

**ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED:
PASTORAL CARE TO FEMALE SURVIVORS OF ABUSE**

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DEDICATION

To All God's Daughters.

May You Come to Know and Experience

for Yourself

the Depth of God's Unconditional Love and Acceptance.

(Ephesians 3:15–17)

ABSTRACT

Abuse of women is a global problem. One in four women suffers physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse in her lifetime. Unfortunately, the same startling statistics sweep across the global Christian community. The research shows that abused Christian women seek help from their pastors more so than all other resources combined, but the sad reality is that they often come away feeling disappointed, frustrated, and hurt by the pastor's response. Through ignorance, lack of training, or misinterpretation of Scripture, many pastors encourage unhealthy submission to abusive spouses, offer inappropriate Christian platitudes, and advocate for the "sacredness of the family" at the expense of a woman's health and life—compelling women to stay in abusive marriages, thus hindering them from receiving the life-giving help they so desperately need.

Recent research indicates that many of these pastors agree that they are ill-equipped to minister to abused Christian women, and some genuinely desire training and ministry resources to help the women in their congregations.

Female survivors of abuse undoubtedly require loving, sensitive, and life-renewing pastoral care, and this project is designed to offer pastoral caregivers a tool to facilitate healing and restoration in God's daughters. The result of this thesis project is a well-planned six-week Bible study called *Accepted in the Beloved*, written to help God's daughters grow in the unconditional love and acceptance of God so that they can live freely in Christ and fulfill their God-given destinies.

Chapter 1

The Problem and Its Setting

Women abuse is a global problem that knows no bounds.¹ Abuse affects all classes of women regardless of their education, socioeconomic background, religious affiliation, ethnicity, or culture. Abuse is the mistreatment of and power over another person for one's own selfish gain.² "One in five women around the globe is physically and sexually abused in her lifetime and gender violence causes more death and disability among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents or war."³

Beyond this startling fact is the reality that women abuse of every form sweeps across the global Christian community.⁴ Rather than being a community that prides itself

¹ The magnitude of the problem of women abuse is overwhelming. The statistics of women abuse are different for each country. For the statistics of several key countries, see Charlotte Watts and Cathy Zimmerman, "Violence Against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude," *The Lancet* 359 (6 April 2002) 1232–37. Cited 12 January 2006. Online: www.thelancet.com. See also *Gender-Based Abuse: the Global Epidemic* [Web site, cited 12 January 2006]. Online: www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0102-311X1994.

² Abuse can take many forms: physical, sexual, economic, emotional, neglect, verbal, and spiritual. Generally, an abused woman experiences more than one form of abuse from her perpetrator. For example, if a woman is being physically abused, this abuse includes emotional abuse as well. Steven Tracy in his book, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 27, says that abuse is "invariably about the abuse of power over another individual—an abuse that perverts the divinely ordained image of God." Nancy Nason-Clark in *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 3, defines abuse by saying, "Violence in the family always involves the abuse of power and control to hurt, shame, or humiliate another person through intimacy and shared experience."

³ Catherine Clark Kroeger and Nancy Nason-Clark, *No Place for Abuse: Biblical and Practical Resources to Counteract Domestic Violence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), back cover.

⁴ Amy Fisch, "The Tension of Powers: Overcoming the Complexity of Domestic Abuse through a Theological Framework of Redemption from the Fall" (M.Div. paper, Gordon-Cornwell Theological Seminary, 2005).

on the love, peace, and justice of Jesus Christ, sadly, it reports the same staggering statistics of women abuse as does the secular culture.⁵

Since women abuse is widespread within the Christian church, the first person an abused woman usually turns to for help is her pastor.⁶ Unfortunately, the countless numbers of abused women who have turned to their pastors and faith communities for help have often been misunderstood, misinformed, misadvised, and mistreated, leading to further abuse and disillusionment with the Christian community.⁷ What happens to these women? In many instances, their suffering is perpetuated rather than allayed, they become more confused about their faith, their image of God and of themselves is distorted, their need for love and acceptance becomes greater, and the glimmer of hope they once had is diminished.⁸ What shall an abused woman do? Where shall she go, if she cannot enter the doors of her local Christian church to find the love, acceptance, comfort, resources, and healing she so desperately needs? Should not the church be a part of the solution to this monumental problem of abused women's needs for love, acceptance, and an authentic healing community? Yes, indeed, the church of Jesus Christ of all places should be an integral part of the solution to the global problem of women abuse.

In Chapter 1, the author will examine the lives and backgrounds of abused Christian women, and, although she will address all forms of abuse, she will focus more specifically on spousal abuse and the lack of pastoral care in addressing this problem in the church. In addition, the author will survey a selection of teachings of the church

⁵ Rev. Al Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 77–100.

⁶ *Peace and Safety in the Christian Home* [Web site, cited 30 December 2005]. Online: <http://www.peaceandsafety.com>.

⁷ Miles, 77.

⁸ Ibid.

spanning two centuries that have influenced the way clergy minister to women. Finally, she will discuss those individuals and organizations that are proactively helping and advocating for abused Christian women today.

Who Is the Abused Christian Woman?

One out of every five Christian women suffers from domestic violence. If this is the statistic for domestic violence alone, then it is conservative to say that one out of every four Christian women suffers from physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, or sexual abuse. *So who is the abused Christian woman?* She is the young girl wandering barefoot and hungry on the mountainside of Bushenyi, Uganda, or the lonely woman walking through the dirty, dusty, dung-covered streets of Calcutta, India, looking for a place of refuge. She is the sharp-looking woman walking into her executive law office on Beacon Hill, or the fashionable woman combing the city limits of upper Manhattan shopping for a bargain. She is the efficient coordinator of the flight attendants on board a Delta 747 Boeing jet heading to Heathrow or the young girlish maiden playing Mary in the annual Christmas pageant at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Wheaton, Illinois.⁹ The abused Christian woman can be found anywhere, at any time, day or night, doing just about anything. She comes from all *walks of life*.¹⁰ She is poor, rich, uneducated, educated, from all ethnicities, and comes from all parts of the globe. And oftentimes she suffers in silence carrying on as if life were routine and perfect.

⁹ The author has ministered to abused women in each of these different contexts.

¹⁰ James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 27.

Denominational Affiliation of Abused Christian Women

Abused Christian women attend all denominations. They attend “conservative, fundamental, moderate, or liberal Catholic or Protestant churches.”¹¹ Some are deeply involved in their church and faith communities, some are moderately involved, and others are not involved at all.¹² Abused women have grown up in Christian homes with pastors, elders, or deacons for fathers; others are recent converts to Christ without any Christian upbringing.

The majority of North American abused women counseled by Constance Doran, founder of S.A.F.E. (Safe Abusive Family Environment), are “warm, intelligent women, very nurturing, empathetic and often devout Christians” who believe that they bear responsibility for their husbands’ emotional and spiritual well-being.¹³ These personable women oftentimes have a “missionary” mentality in dealing with their husbands. Somehow, they entertain fantasies of rescuing their husbands from their deviant behavior. According to Doran:

These fantasies motivate them to repeatedly endure their husbands’ violence. Such women are caregivers who interpret violent acts as evidence that their husbands need their help. . . . She takes pleasure in her dream of being his rescuer. Her ability to endure his violence is not seen as helplessness or masochism, but rather as evidence of her moral strength. She is the nurturing mother; he is the naughty child whose violence is merely another sign of his immaturity and consequently his need for help.¹⁴

An abused woman often believes that if she “hangs in there” for the long haul, her husband will eventually succumb to her exemplary caregiving and nurturing, and finally turn his life around and be the husband she needs him to be. Doran, in counseling twenty-

¹¹ Miles, 77.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 35.

¹⁴ Ibid.

one abuse survivors, discovered that seventeen out of the twenty-one women showed signs of this “missionary” mindset.¹⁵

Phyllis Alsdurf, in her groundbreaking book *Battered into Submission*, confirms Doran’s findings. She says that out of one hundred women she has interviewed, seventy percent of them shared the same “missionary” mindset.¹⁶ Unfortunately, abused women are determined to save their husbands at any cost.

Three significant reasons keep a Christian woman locked into an abusive marriage. According to Nancy Nason-Clark and Catherine Clark Kroeger in *No Place for Abuse*, the number one reason an abused woman stays in an abusive marriage is fear— an appropriate emotion given the circumstances. What do they fear? Abused women fear the future, fear more violence, and fear for the lives of their children.¹⁷

A second reason women stay in abusive marriages is the teaching in the church, especially by conservative Protestants, on the “sacredness of the family unit.”¹⁸ A Christian woman remains in the abusive relationship due to her fear of blame and retribution from the church for daring to break up the family unit. She desires to serve God with all her heart, but she is confused and conflicted about her options as a Christian woman. What shall she do? What does the Bible really say? To whom shall she turn for help? Moreover, what is God calling her to do? These vexing questions plague the abused Christian woman and further exacerbate her pain and suffering.

¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., 109.

A third reason is financial—women become economically dependent upon their husbands, especially if unable to work due to child rearing.¹⁹ They do not believe there are viable economic options to enable them to break free from the abusive marriage.

Abuse Survivors' Backgrounds

Many abused women come from dysfunctional families where they have never had their basic needs for love and nurture met.²⁰ Therefore, many do not feel worthy to receive love, and, more often than not, women who come from abusive families unconsciously marry someone who is also incapable of meeting their love needs. Moreover, the abusive spouse “satisfies an unhealthy need” stemming from their family background.²¹ At times, because abused women have suffered from childhood abuse, they are vulnerable to further abuses later in life, be they spiritual, verbal, emotional, or physical.²² Unfortunately, if these women do not receive healing, they are prime targets for unhealthy, manipulative, controlling male predators in the church or outside the church.

Their abuse as adults further intensifies their negative feelings about themselves (low self-esteem) and serves to reinforce their negative views of God. Many abused women, whether they have suffered abuse in childhood or adulthood, have difficulty believing that God unconditionally loves and accepts them.²³

¹⁹ Ibid., 12.

²⁰ Norman Giesbrecht and Irene Sevcik, “The Process of Recovery and Rebuilding among Abused Women in the Conservation Evangelical Subculture,” *Journal of Family Violence* 3 (2000): 15. Many abused women, however, grow up in loving Christian homes, according to testimonies shared at the April 2006 conference at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, of the organization Peace and Safety in the Christian Home.

²¹ Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 31.

²² Gary R. Collins, *Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 39.

²³ Tracy, 173.

What do women have to say about their abuse that makes it difficult to believe in God's unconditional love? Two personal stories from survivors of childhood and adulthood abuse illustrate:

I grew up in a dysfunctional family where alcoholism, workaholism, and occasional bouts of violence were the norm. I never felt loved by my parents. I remember sitting in school daydreaming and wondering whether my parents loved me or not. I thought they did when they bought me a new bicycle or some other material item. I didn't want all these material things; I only wanted their time and their love. . . . Eventually I came to the Lord, but it took me at least fifteen years as a Christian (and sometimes I still struggle with believing I am worthy of love) to understand and believe that God really loves me and accepts me, and that I don't have to be perfect in order to receive God's love (Jamie, personal testimony).

I was married to a well-known elder in a large evangelical community church. . . . I had few friends and had "no time" for personal friendships or for discretionary reading and activities. . . . I had made a \$50 purchase without my husband's permission. When my husband found out, he became enraged, and in front of the children, he lectured me on how God in his love punished the children of Israel when they disobeyed. He declared that he was to "love" me in the same way. I was to be punished from that point on. . . . He continued to make reference to "God's loving punishment." . . . When my counselor began to describe the true nature of God's love reflected in the way Jesus respectfully and gently responded to Mary Magdalene and to other women, I sobbed uncontrollably. My heart resonated with this truth. I was created for that kind of love. I was starving for godly love, having been manipulated and bullied by a self-righteous husband who twisted Scripture to humiliate me as an inferior.²⁴

These are only two stories of abused women, but it is obvious that the effects of abuse are devastating; without divine intervention by an all-loving, compassionate, powerful, healing God, abuse can scar a woman for life. It takes years to heal from such abuse, to be able to believe in God's unconditional love, and to have a positive view of God.

The clergy play a major role in the healing of abused women, including the healing of their image of God and relationship to God. Therefore, if the clergy do not

²⁴ Ibid., 33.

adequately represent God, this can further damage abused women both spiritually and emotionally. Clergy represent Christ's hands and voice to the hurting Christian woman; therefore, it is imperative that they provide good pastoral care, or at least partner or consult with secular agencies who can provide the care needed.

What Has Been the Clergy's Support (or Non-support) of Abused Women?

When women are experiencing the horrors of abuse, usually the first person they turn to is their pastor. In fact, abused women "consult their pastors more than all other resources combined."²⁵ They are desperate for good counsel, loving support, and practical resources. However, the unfortunate problem is that many (not all, since there are many who have given wise and loving counsel) pastors have lacked the training, knowledge, love, compassion, understanding, and sensitivity in ministering to abused women.²⁶ Pastors have such a difficult time even believing that women abuse exists in the church that, out of 158 pastors interviewed by Rev. Al Miles, many, especially the males, insisted that women abuse did not exist within the walls of their churches.²⁷ When a woman finally finds the courage to open her heart and bare her soul, a pastor often disbelieves a woman's story and blames her for her own victimization.²⁸

What has been "said and done" by some pastors, in the name of God, to reinforce abused women's distorted images of God and to force women to go outside the church

²⁵ *Peace and Safety in the Christian Home* [Web site, cited 30 December 2005]. Online: <http://www.peaceandsafety.com>.

²⁶ Miles, 47–76, and Nason-Clark, 70. Nason-Clark, a social scientist and author of *The Battered Wife*, says that "clergy themselves admit how ill-prepared they are in the area of pastoral counseling, particularly in the area of wife battery."

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

for help? The following are a few examples of abuse problems that Christian women disclosed to their pastors; underneath the problem is their pastor's response:

- “My husband had struck me and beaten me four times.”
 - “It is your duty to stay and suffer for Jesus’ sake.”²⁹
- “My husband, a pastor, inflicted physical, psychological, and sexual torture on me as a newlywed. He forced me to watch pornography, and then asked me to perform similar acts on him. He beat me when I didn’t obey.”
 - “Are you praying enough? How much time are you spending reading the word? Do you have any unconfessed sin? God won’t give you any more than you can handle; you must remember that God calls us to be a living sacrifice.”³⁰
- “My husband was violent and threatened to murder me if I left him. He also verbally, sexually and physically abused me regularly and cheated on me. He abused the children and even punched one of them in the face in front of our pastor. I finally had to obtain a restraining order against him.”
 - “You should meet with your husband to try to reconcile. It’s important that you stay with him since your children need a father. You must put on the heart of Esther in order to win your husband back—this means you should be your husband’s whore.”³¹

Unfortunately, these are the injurious, uncompassionate responses by *Christian* pastors to these women’s horrific abuse problems. And these responses are only but a sampling of the responses given by pastors to abused women in distress. Other unhelpful and inappropriate platitudes spoken by clergy to abused women in time of need have been:³²

- Pray a little harder.

²⁹ Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 65.

³⁰ Miles, 80.

³¹ Ibid., 85–86.

³² Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 20–21; and Miles, 59.

- Try to be a better wife and be more considerate of him.
- Obey or submit to him.
- Keep your family together, for this is God's will.
- You have to forgive totally and commit yourself one hundred percent.
- God will never give you more than you can handle.
- All Christians have crosses to bear; suffering builds character.

Most of the fifty-two female survivors interviewed by Rev. Miles, author of *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know*, shared that they felt . . .

“angered, disappointed, and hurt by the ways in which clergy people responded to their reports of abuse. The survivors believe that ordained ministers do not provide appropriate or consistent care to victims, misinterpret Scripture to support male domination and female subjugation, blame victims for their abuse, hesitate to confront perpetrators, deny the prevalence of domestic violence within their own congregations, and pressure victims to stay in dangerous marriages.”³³

Is there a need in the church to minister effectively to abused women? Of course, there is a *great* ongoing need. The majority of pastors agree that they are ill-equipped to provide wise and helpful counsel to abused women, and many are sincerely willing to receive more training in order to care for the abused women in their congregations. But what is the origin of the false teachings and erroneous ideas to which many pastors have succumbed, and either advertently or inadvertently prescribed to hurting women?³⁴ What is the historical precedent behind these degrading and inappropriate words and counsel to women?

³³ Miles, 95.

³⁴ Nason-Clark says that an important factor in clergy not providing sensitive and wise counsel to abused women has everything to do with the way they interpret the Christian model of marriage.

Where Does This Problem Originate?

Many teachings of the church throughout the centuries have negatively influenced the way clergy view women, which has adversely affected the way the majority of clergy have ministered to abused women. It makes sense to survey a selection of teachings and comments of rabbis, teachers, theologians, commentators, and clergy beginning from 180 B.C. up to the twentieth century to understand the pervasive negative view of women that has spread from generation to generation and has influenced ministry to women and, thus, contributed to the abuse of women.

Two Centuries Before Christ (180 B.C.)

If one goes as far back to the writings of Jesus ben Sira, a Jewish sage who lived two centuries before Christ, one can see the low view of women held during that time.³⁵ Ben Sira said, “He who acquires a wife gets his best possession.”³⁶ He considered women nothing more than the possession of men. He also wrote that a bad wife is “publicly disgracing, uncontrollable, drunken, adulterous, angry, impossible to live with, worthy of a curse, babbling, seductive, emasculating, unpleasant, sin-originating, outspoken, and worthy of divorce.”³⁷

First-Century Jewish Thought

In ancient Israel, women also were considered their husbands’ possessions. In fact, a woman referred to her husband in the same way that a slave referred to his master, by

³⁵ Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 42–43.

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ Sirach 36:2.

calling him master or lord.³⁸ A man could easily divorce his wife, but a woman could not legally obtain a writ of divorce from her husband.³⁹ And a wife could never inherit her husband's property unless she were the only remaining heir.⁴⁰ In Judaism, women were not encouraged to learn the Torah. In fact, the rabbis believed that "Anyone who teaches his daughter Torah (the oral tradition of Torah), it is as if he taught her licentiousness."⁴¹ Imagine, for a father to teach his daughter Torah was as if he were teaching her a lack of moral discipline. Women, obviously, had no value or worth in the eyes of many rabbis, the prominent religious teachers of that day.

A prayer that was well known in three different traditions—the Tosephta, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the Babylonian Talmud—was:

Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man.⁴²

This prayer was not written with the purpose of debasing gentiles, women, and slaves, but rather to accentuate the fact that only men were required to learn Torah and that they were grateful for the privilege.⁴³ Nevertheless, it is still a prayer handed down from Judaism that has contributed to the denigration of women.

Early Christian Writings

Surprisingly, two prominent Jewish historians (Philo and Josephus) and two prominent early church fathers (Tertullian and Augustine) each held negative views of

³⁸ Roland De Vaux. *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 39.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Num 27:8.

⁴¹ Gittin 1.1.

⁴² *Torah.org* [Web site, cited 2 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.Torah.org>.

⁴³ Tucker and Liefeld, 61.

women. One would suspect that Philo, especially, would hold a favorable view toward women because he lived in Alexandria during the Hellenistic period, when women were held in high regard and afforded many opportunities for growth and learning.⁴⁴ However, this reasoning does not stand. Philo said of women that they are “best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house.” And he added, “the female sex is irrational and akin to bestial passions, fear, sorrow, pleasure and desire, from which ensue incurable weaknesses and indescribable diseases.”⁴⁵

Josephus shared his view of women in a selection of his writing: “From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex.”⁴⁶ In his view, then, no male should pay attention to evidence given by a woman because of the inconstancy of her speech and recklessness of her sex. Tertullian did extensive damage to a woman’s image with his profoundly negative comments:

In order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve—the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and odium [attaching to her as the cause] of human perdition. . . . In pains and in anxiety dost thou bear, woman; and toward thine husband [is] thy inclination, and he lords it over thee. . . . And do you not know that you are [each] an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must of necessity live too. . . . You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert [i.e., punishment], that is, death—even the Son of God had to die.⁴⁷

Tertullian (A.D. 160–240) called Eve a “devil’s gateway,”⁴⁸ blaming her for the first sin in the Garden of Eden, for deceiving Adam, and for destroying God’s image. Since

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Tucker and Liefeld, 63.

⁴⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities* 4:219.

⁴⁷ Tucker and Liefeld, 102–03, and Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.1 (ANF 4:14).

⁴⁸ Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.1 (ANF 4:14).

Tertullian said that all women are Eves, he believed that all women should pay the price for Eve's sin by heaping upon themselves the unbearable pain and guilt from this first sin. How does one reconcile Tertullian's comment, "the guilt must of necessity live,"⁴⁹ with the fact that Jesus Christ came to earth and was crucified on behalf of God's people, male and *female*, so that they would no longer have to remain in sin and guilt, but live in freedom of forgiveness in Christ Jesus?

Augustine (A.D. 354–430) held similar views:

It is the natural order among people that women serve their husbands and children their parents, because the justice of this lies in [the principle that] the lesser serves the greater. . . . This is the natural justice that the weaker brain serve the stronger. This therefore is the evident justice in the relationships between slaves and their masters, that they who excel in reason, excel in power.⁵⁰

Early church hierarchical/patriarchal teachings such as these fuel pastors' misunderstanding of women, "promote negative attitudes of women, and sanction violence against them."⁵¹

The Medieval Church

Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225–1274), a thirteenth-century medieval theologian, negatively affected the image of women in the church. He believed that a woman was created "defective and accidentally."⁵² He credited her "being" as nothing more than "a

⁴⁹ Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum* 1.1.1–2.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, n.p. Cited on *womenpriests.org* [Web site, cited 31 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/inferior.asp>.

⁵¹ Giesbrecht and Sevvick, 230. It is important to note that the early church fathers' teachings adhere to the teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) considered women "infertile males." He believed that "the reason why the man dominates in society is due to his superior intelligence." Plato (427–347 B.C.) believed "women came about through the physical degeneration of the human being." From *womenpriests.org* [Web site, cited 31 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/inferior.asp>.

⁵² Tucker and Liefeld, 164.

male gone awry.”⁵³ He attributed her female genetic makeup as a “weakness of her father’s generative power, or some external factor, like a damp south wind.”⁵⁴ In addition, he said, “a woman is subject to a man, on account of the weakness of her nature, both mind and body. . . . Woman is in subjection according to the law of nature, but a slave is not.”⁵⁵

Two Dominican friars in 1486 wrote a manual called *Malleus Maleficarum, the Witches’ Hammer*. The book contains many dishonoring comments about women and an entire chapter is devoted to the topic “women’s inferiority and her willing cohabitation with demons.”⁵⁶ The manual says that the woman is a deceiver because she was formed from Adam’s *crooked* rib and the word woman, *femina*, according to them, means “less in faith.”⁵⁷ The manual also emphatically states, “All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. . . . It is not good to marry: What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colors.”⁵⁸

These are but a few of the shocking comments about women from the medieval period that shed light on the prevailing view of women in that era. It is heartening, however, to note that not all medieval church leaders held the same views or opinions of

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tucker and Liefeld, 164, and “Women Were Considered Inferior Creatures,” *Womenpriests.org* [Web site, cited 31 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.womenpriests.org/traditio/inferior.asp/>.

⁵⁶ Tucker and Liefeld, 166.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Competition and Feeling Superior to Others: Society Establishes Gender Roles for Us,” n.p. [cited 31 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.mentalhelp.net/psyhelp/chap9/chap9p.htm>.

women as these men did; some were greatly encouraging toward women and were not afraid or ashamed to share their positive regard for the opposite sex.

The Reformers

With the reformation of the church came new frontiers for women, especially in the area of education. Martin Luther (1483–1536) was a proponent of education for both men and women.⁵⁹ Although Luther was progressive in his encouragement of women's education, overall, he held a low view of women, considering them inferior to men.

Luther, in his discussion of creation, says:

Moses here places the man and the woman together in order that no one might think that the woman was to be excluded from the glory of the future life. The woman certainly differs from the man, for she is weaker in body and intellect [than he]. Nevertheless, Eve was an excellent creature and equal to Adam so far as the divine image, that is, righteousness, wisdom and eternal salvation, is concerned. Still, she was only a woman. As the sun is much more glorious than the moon, so the woman was [created] inferior to the man both in honor and dignity, though she, too, was a very excellent work of God.⁶⁰

The view of women espoused by French reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) is ambiguous; some church historians believe that he is a traditionalist in his view on women's subordination, but others see his understanding of the "silence of women in the church" in the 1 Corinthians passage as more progressive.⁶¹ Jayne Dempsey Douglas in "Women, Freedom and Calvin," confirms Calvin's openness:

Calvin's persistent teaching that the silence of women in church is a matter of time-bound apostolic advice rather than divine law for all time is an example of his openness to major change in the future.⁶²

⁵⁹ Tucker and Liefeld, 173.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 174.

⁶¹ Ibid., 175.

⁶² Jane Dempsey Douglas, "Women, Freedom and Calvin," *Theology Today*, n.p. [cited 4 January 2006]. Online: <http://theologytoday.com>.

John Knox, the Scottish reformer, showed a disdain for women in his public proclamations and in his writings. Some scholars thought that perhaps his vehemence against women might have had to do with his displeasure with the two popular Marys of his day: Mary Tudor, queen of England, and Mary Guise, queen of Scotland.⁶³ In his comments against women's leadership, he unashamedly expressed his opinion saying women are "weake, fraile, impatient, feeble and foolishe" . . . "unconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment" . . . And they are made to "serve and obey man."⁶⁴

As one can see, women did not receive the greatest of encouragement from the Reformers. These sharp negativisms cut to the heart of the Bride of Christ, one-half of God's image, and have given rise to tremendous misunderstanding of women's roles in the church and family, opening the door for women abuse.

Following in the reformers' footsteps were the Anabaptists, whose views and teachings on women were similar and, in some cases, more extreme. Take, for example, the writings of Bernard Rottman, who argued for polygamy in his book *The Restitution of Sound Christian Doctrine*. He asserts, "Women have been wearing the trousers for too long. It is time for man to assert his God-given superiority."⁶⁵ And men do this, according to him, by living a polygamous lifestyle.⁶⁶ A man who asserts a false superiority over women by using them to meet his needs will not, in any way, bring about the restitution of sound Christian doctrine; rather, he will serve to pervert God's holy word.

⁶³ Tucker and Liefeld, 177.

⁶⁴ Tucker and Liefeld, 177, and Wendy J. Dunn, "Women's History—Tudor Women Weak? No Way!" n.p. [cited 2005]. Online: http://www.suite101.com/article/cfm/womens_history/111838.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Contemporary Views of Women

Many contemporary voices of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries express similar views to those of earlier generations. Among them is John Rice (1895–1980), a fundamentalist Baptist minister and theologian. His theological views on women from his infamous book called *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* negatively influenced hosts of Pentecostal and fundamentalist pastors and contributed to an unhealthy teaching on submission and obedience. He asserts:

Man is made in the image of God. God is a masculine God. The masculine pronoun is used of God everywhere in the Bible. . . . God is not effeminate. God is not feminine, but masculine. And man is made in the image of God. On the other hand, a woman is not made so much in the image of God, but in the image and as a mate to man. . . . Blessed is the woman that remembers this; her glory is in being a help to a man, and in submission to her husband or her father.⁶⁷

Dr. Rice misinterpreted Scripture to teach that woman is inferior to man. False teachings such as these continue to oppress women, inhibit them from taking their rightful place in God's kingdom, and promote women abuse in the church.

John MacArthur, a conservative evangelical voice, uses his daily broadcast, *Grace to You*, and his prolific writings to espouse his theological position on the Christian woman and her family. He believes that "In order for the family to function in harmony, the woman, with no loss of dignity, takes the place of submission to the headship of her husband."⁶⁸ MacArthur's interpretation of submission is for the husband to go off to work each day, leaving his wife home to manage household chores such as cleaning, cooking, baking, and rearing the children.⁶⁹ Regarding women abuse, he

⁶⁷ John Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers*, quoted in *Go to the Bible.com* [cited 7 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.gotobible.com>.

⁶⁸ Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

believes that even if a woman fears her husband, she should submit just the same, because if abuse occurs, God will “take care of the results.”⁷⁰ In addition, he suggests that because woman is a fallen creature, she is after man’s power. Rather than try to usurp the man’s power, he says a woman needs to be satisfied staying home, submitting and obeying, since, after all, she is the weaker one in the relationship.⁷¹

Paul and Richard Meier, of the nationally known Minirth-Meier Christian Counseling Clinic, assert that if a wife submits to her husband, she will realize her true freedom in Christ.⁷² Questioning the very idea of submission, even under abusive conditions, is in their estimation an expression of “aggression, anger and rebellion.”⁷³

Tim and Beverly LaHaye in their book *The Spirit-Filled Family*, believe that the family is served best when the husband assumes the male leadership role and the wife takes the submissive role.⁷⁴ As a precaution against divorce, according to them, a couple should stay deeply committed to the marriage, and the wife should especially monitor her “attitude and actions of submission” because they are a reflection (or, in their words, a barometer) of her relationship to Christ.⁷⁵ In essence, what they are saying is that the burden of guilt rests on the wife if any marital discord arises.⁷⁶

Clyde Narramore, a Christian psychologist and radio host of *Psychology for Living*, believes that submission of wives to their husbands is an unquestionable biblical

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 86–87.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife*, 24.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

directive; he says this is God's instituted "chain of command" for the family.⁷⁷

Concerning wife abuse, Narramore believes that a wife should submit no matter what, since the Bible does not tell wives to submit only if husbands treat them well, but under any condition, even if abuse exists.⁷⁸ His advice to counselors is this: Tell wives to submit regardless of abuse, because they will suffer for Christ's sake, following in his example.⁷⁹

There is nothing new under the sun; more than two thousand years later, one hears the same words almost verbatim as modern-day Christian authors, radio hosts, and counselors spew out injurious and inappropriate words of advice to hurting wives, and to their pastors and counselors, supposed sources of strength, comfort, and encouragement. What a travesty of justice! What a crime against God's beloved elect! Rather than allowing God to use them to demolish the weak, shaky, and faulty foundation of wrongful attitudes and theological beliefs about women, and to lay a strong, solid, and truthful foundation that restores women to their dignified place in God's kingdom, their rhetoric reinforces a low view of women, perpetuates hierarchical structures in the church, and sanctions women abuse.

To sum up this selection of teachings and comments throughout the centuries, beginning two hundred years before Christ up to the twentieth century, overall, what are the false messages preached and taught about women that contribute to the abuse of women? These false messages proclaimed to the Christian church are that a woman is . . .

- The originator of sin

⁷⁷ Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 86–87.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 88.

- Inferior and unequal to man
- Worthless, without value
- The destroyer of God's image
- Man's possession
- Less educated

In addition, according to these voices, a woman is called to . . .

- Submit and obey man
- Meet her husband's needs
- Suffer like Jesus, even if this means living in a violently abusive marriage

These negative messages perpetuate male domination and gender inequality, and encourage violence against women. If this is what many pastors are taught, and oftentimes believe, about women, how will they ever offer authentic healing communities where women suffering from *any form of abuse* can receive the love, acceptance, understanding, and resources they need for healing and restoration so that they can live the abundant life that Christ died to make possible? Where shall a woman go to unleash her pain and sorrow, to find a safe haven from abuse, and to establish trusting relationships that will encourage spiritual and emotional growth? Will a woman be forced to look outside the church to receive the help she needs? One must ask these pertinent questions if one ever hopes to bring positive life-transforming changes to the twenty-first century church that will ultimately help heal shattered lives, strengthen marriages, and restore women to their rightful and dignified place in the church of Jesus Christ.

Who Is Addressing This Problem of the Lack of Pastoral Care to Abused Women?

God seems to be raising up an army of dedicated Christians to fight this battle against women abuse in the church and Christian home. Since the 1990s, many Christian organizations and individuals have collaborated for the purpose of trying to stop abuse in the Christian home, to advocate for women, to facilitate healing in the hearts of abused Christian women, and to train clergy to minister effectively to abused women. Who are these proactive organizations and individuals? And what are the Bible studies that have been written to minister to abused women?

Proactive Organizations for the Healing of Abused Women

Peace and Safety in the Christian Home is a Christian network of internationally distinguished researchers, scholars, and theologians formed in 2004 with the purpose of “increasing peace and safety in the Christian home and in the world it serves by addressing and decreasing domestic and sexual abuse in those homes.”⁸⁰ Their mission is being accomplished through ongoing prayer—which is critical for their work—through collaborating with other individuals and organizations to stop abuse, through disseminating and developing resources, through education and training to raise public awareness of the extent of the problem, and through conferences to further train pastors, educators, laypersons, service providers, and law enforcement officials.⁸¹

The *Task Force to Stop Abuse against Women* (a branch of the World Evangelical Alliance), a global organization of Christian leaders, was formed in 1997 to address specifically the escalating problem of abuse against girls and women by Christian

⁸⁰ *Peace and Safety in the Christian Home* [Web site, cited 30 December 2005]. Online: <http://www.peaceandsafety.com>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

leaders.⁸² The organization has a five-pronged approach: “to educate evangelical clergy, to make evangelical churches safe to disclose abuse, to ensure and coordinate appropriate response to abuse victims, to offer ministry opportunities to concerned lay people and to support efforts to reduce violence.”⁸³

Women of Substance is a New York-area Christian faith-based domestic violence organization committed to helping and healing abused women. The organization provides a 24-hour crisis hotline that handles all forms of abuse and produces a radio talk show that addresses the problem of abuse, offering callers a platform to discuss their various struggles and their ability to overcome with God’s intervention.⁸⁴ In addition, Women of Substance provides resources and referrals to meet the needs of its clients. Moreover, Women of Substance is in the process of purchasing a “Safe House” for women and their children who are suffering from abuse issues.

Focus Ministries, Inc., is a nonprofit organization with offices in Illinois and Kentucky, which “offers hope, encouragement and assistance” to abused women, specializing in dysfunctional marriages, spousal abuse, separation, and divorce.⁸⁵ Focus Ministries’ purpose is to provide help to women in dysfunctional marriages, to improve their self-images, and to encourage women to live productively for Christ.⁸⁶

A Door of Hope Ministries, a nonprofit Christian organization located in Tennessee, was formed to address the problem of abuse and to minister specifically to hurting Christian woman. A Door of Hope’s mission is to minister healing to the

⁸² *The Task Force to Stop Abuse against Women* [Web site, cited 7 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.abuseofwomen.org>.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Women of Substance* [Web site, cited 7 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.womenofsubstance.com>.

⁸⁵ *Focus Ministries, Inc.* [Web site, cited 7 January 2006]. Online: <http://www.focusministries.org>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

wounded through training and counseling.⁸⁷ The ministry facilitates healing through weeklong seminars, weekend retreats, and a four-week healing intensive in a residential program.⁸⁸

Safe Haven Ministries of Grand Rapids, Michigan, was formed in 1990 with a mission of “renewing the human spirit and building a strong community by ending the cycle of domestic abuse through Christ’s love.”⁸⁹ Safe Haven provides a shelter with a host of supportive services. They have a program called *Protective Hands* that offers counseling, advocacy, and educational and therapeutic support groups for women and children. *Raise Hope* is another program that educates pastors and congregations of all denominations on the issues of domestic abuse and violence while helping to raise public awareness about these pertinent and prevalent issues.

These global and regional Christian organizations have formed to help abused women by trying to stop abuse in the Christian home and to offer healing and restoration to God’s daughters. In addition, a non-Christian national coalition is located in Denver, Colorado, and non-Christian state coalitions against women abuse and violence exist in most states in the United States.⁹⁰ Of course, a host of both Christian and non-Christian counseling and learning centers help abused women throughout the United States by offering hope, love, encouragement, emotional and physical support, life skills, and expert counsel and advice.

⁸⁷ *A Door of Hope Ministries* [Web site, cited 7 January 2006]. Online: <http://adoorofhope.com>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Safe Have Ministries* [Web site, cited 7 January 2006]. Online: <http://safehavenministries.org>.

⁹⁰ Miles, 199–208.

Bible Studies for the Healing of Abuse Victims

What Bible studies have been written to offer hope, healing, and restoration to abused women?

Catherine Clark Kroeger, ranked adjunct associate professor of classical and ministry studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has made contributions on behalf of women abuse in the church. She has published numerous books and articles advocating for peace and safety in the Christian home. She has also prepared a one-page Bible study on wife abuse.⁹¹ The study contains thoughts about the husband and wife abuse, thoughts about a wife and God's biblical patterns for her, and thoughts about both husband and wife. She offers Scripture passages on each section for study, reflection, and understanding. Her goal is to stop wife abuse in the church and to promote healing and restoration in women and in marital relationships.

Dale Ryan, executive director of Recovery Partnerships, and Juanita Ryan, a counselor, have written two Life Recovery Guides dealing with the issue of abuse. The first guide is *Recovery from Abuse*.⁹² The intent of the study is to reach anyone who has suffered abuse (written for males and females), be it physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual, to encourage the abused in their recovery, and to help them experience the healing presence of God. The second guide is *Recovery from Distorted Images of God*. The intent of this study is to help the abused to identify the roots of distorted images of God and to help replace them with an understanding of the true nature of God.⁹³ Each guide offers

⁹¹ Catherine Clark Kroeger, *Bible Study on Wife Abuse* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2000).

⁹² Dale Ryan and Juanita Ryan, *Recovery from Abuse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

⁹³ Dale Ryan and Juanita Ryan, *Recovery from Distorted Images of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 12.

six studies for groups or individuals in a workbook format. Each of the six lessons has three sections: personal reflection, Bible study, and prayer.⁹⁴ The guides are meant to be “thought-provoking, challenging, inspiring and personal,” but are not intended to take the place of a recovery program or professional counsel.⁹⁵

Elsa Kok Lynch has written *A Woman Who Hurts, A God Who Heals: Discovering Unconditional Love*, a fifteen-week workbook for women suffering from shame or hurt resulting from past sexually or emotionally abusive relationships.⁹⁶ Each study has Scripture with application and a section to journal one’s thoughts, reflections, and feelings. The author’s intent is for women to come to experience, through Scripture, the amazing unconditional love of God that will inevitably lead to healing and wholeness.

Linda Cochrane, the director of Hopeline Women’s Center in Monroe, Connecticut, has written *The Path to Sexual Healing: A Bible Study*, an eight-week study for men and women suffering from sexual abuse.⁹⁷ Each study includes a brief Bible study, Scripture verses to memorize, and thought-provoking questions to facilitate discussion. The purpose of the study is to facilitate healing and restoration in victims of sexual abuse and to help prepare the Bride of Christ to be holy and blameless as she awaits her Bridegroom’s return.

Not many Bible studies have been published specifically for abused Christian women. There is a great need for good materials in the church that will specifically address a Christian woman’s need for love, acceptance, understanding, healing, and restoration.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Elsa Kok, *A Woman Who Hurts: A God Who Heals* (Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 2002).

⁹⁷ Linda Cochrane, *The Path to Sexual Healing* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

Women abuse of any kind is evil. It is a crime against God's creation. All that God created is good, and to do violence against God's daughters is a sin. Ultimately, the problem of women abuse in the church is a problem of evil.⁹⁸ For the church to deny its existence, to sit back and do nothing, or to offer unwise, unloving, inappropriate counsel is also a sin against the law of God. Does not the Lord of all creation desire his people, especially his priests, "To do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with our God"?⁹⁹ Let the ministers of God seek to fulfill the commands of God by endeavoring to understand, rightly inform, offer wise Biblical and theological counsel, unconditionally love and accept abused women, and act justly in trying to stop abuse in the Christian home.

In chapter 2, the author will provide the biblical and theological framework that supports her project. Chapter 3 will review the literature that the author found most helpful in formulating and developing her thesis. Chapter 4 will explain the project design in its three phases over a four-year period, and chapter 5 will record the outcomes of the project and conclude with a summary.

⁹⁸ Alsdurf and Alsdurf, 62.

⁹⁹ Mic 6:8. All Scriptures references are from NRSV unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 2

Theological Framework

The effects of abuse are devastating. During a counseling session, a little girl painted a picture of the effects of her abuse. What did she paint? She meticulously painted “a watercolored heart punctured with black and gray holes, visualizing the hurt and damage done by abuse.”¹ Abuse cuts to the heart and soul, creating deep wounds in God’s beloved. Healing from abuse takes time; it is a process requiring love, acceptance, patience, and tender care. Those called to the pastoral care ministry must rely on God’s word to understand best how to minister effectively to the hurting. This chapter will focus on four key topics that will provide the biblical and theological framework for pastoral caregivers to offer abused women the practical wisdom and understanding they need for recovery and restoration. The four topics are creation and the image of God, the attributes of God, living in freedom, and discovering one’s call.

Creation and the Image of God

In ministering to abused women, it is common to hear a woman in pain ask, “Who am I?” because abuse damages one’s self-image. Unfortunately, a woman’s perpetrator (parent, spouse, significant other) acts as mirror—a distorted mirror—reflecting false images of God and of her identity as a child of God. This presents a dilemma. How can a woman know who she is unless she has an accurate concept of God and who she is in relation to God?

¹ Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 131.

One must go back to the beginning in the book of Genesis to find the answers to these existential questions. What does the creation account in Genesis have to say about who we are as the children of God? Genesis 1:26–27 says:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness. . . . So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female he created them.

Male and female are created in the image of God. God, out of love, created his beloved people to reflect his very image. Because it is impossible to reflect the physical image of God, for God is spirit,² how do God’s people reflect his image? There are different aspects of the image of God.³ The first is the relational aspect of God’s image.⁴ God is a relational God, and one can see this in the unity and diversity within the Godhead. God is a triune God, one person with three distinct personalities. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit intimately relate to one another out of love for one another. Jesus’ last prayer to the Father before his death and resurrection is a clear example of the intimacy and oneness that Jesus desires for his people. Jesus looks to heaven and cries out to the Father, saying:

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.⁵

Jesus is in the Father, the Father is in him, and he prays that God’s people will be one as they are one. Since God’s children are not divine beings, they become one by mutually loving and serving one another. By virtue of their humanity, they long for holy,

² John 4:24.

³ Tracy, 23.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John 17:20–23.

intimate, loving relationships with one another.⁶ They reflect God's image when they love, honor, and enjoy each other. God created God's people for community.⁷ The ultimate expression of human oneness is the one-flesh union between a man and a woman. Husband and wife are no longer two separate entities unto themselves; they are one. The one-flesh relationship is a holy union instituted by God. However, when abuse occurs, the relational image of God is perverted.⁸ Trust is a key component of a one-flesh relationship. When a woman is abused in either childhood or adulthood, she will inevitably find it difficult to trust. An abused woman will develop difficulties around the trust and bonding called for by the relational aspect of God, because these qualities have not been reflected appropriately in her human relationships.

A second aspect of the image of God is the visible aspect.⁹ This, in essence, is how God's people reflect the attributes of God such as love, faithfulness, compassion, justice, and holiness. When a woman or child is abused, what has been reflected back to her is anything but godliness; instead, what has been made visible is the essence of evil. Therefore, if her image of God is distorted, then it makes sense that the image she has of herself is distorted.

The third aspect of God's image is the functional aspect.¹⁰ This is how God's people are called to function or work in the world. Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the wild animals, and over

⁶ Tracy, 24.

⁷ Eph 4:1–6.

⁸ Tracy, 23.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” God also gives his people authority to rule over all the earth, and says, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). God gives his people authority to “work and take care” of the land, which involves caring and tending the land by “control and cultivation.”¹¹ The functional image is distorted as well when God’s people are unjustly controlled and manipulated through abuse.

Abuse, which is sin, distorts every aspect of the image of God. Therefore, an abused woman often has had an inaccurate image of God reflected back to her. Since her image of God is distorted, an abused woman desperately needs an accurate representation of God. What are the accurate biblical images of God that a woman needs to know in order to bring healing and restoration to her wounded soul and to be able to reflect more accurately all three aspects of the image of God? God has numerous attributes, but several in particular are vital for an abused woman to know and experience in order to catapult her forward in her hunger for biblical truth, enabling her to answer the question, “Who am I?” These attributes are love, faithfulness, compassion, justice, and holiness.

The Attributes of God

If a pastor were to ask an abused woman what she needed most, what would she say? She would most often say, “I need *love*.”¹² And continuing she may add, “For I cannot know and understand God’s unconditional love and acceptance, that love you so often preach about, unless you first show me or help me to know and experience God’s love.”

¹¹ Ibid., 24.

¹² Ibid., 196.

Love

Every abused woman needs to know and experience God's unconditional love if she is ever going to heal, thrive, and reach out beyond herself. Why is this so? Because the very people in her life who were supposed to provide love and nurture—namely her parents, spouse, and significant others—were the ones who abused her. Therefore, she has never experienced a healthy love. Children need to experience love in order to grow and thrive. Child development studies have conclusively shown that children need to experience ongoing love and nurture with their primary caregiver in order to thrive physically, emotionally, and spiritually.¹³

How does an abused Christian woman view God's love? To her, God's love is unattainable.¹⁴ She believes that she is unworthy to receive God's love, that God loves everyone but her, and that she must be perfect in order to receive this love; therefore, love must be conditional.¹⁵ But there is nothing further from the truth. God loves her deeply and is grieved over her suffering.

What does the Bible tell us about love? The Bible has a great deal to say about love. In fact, the Bible is God's love story to his people. God demonstrated his amazing love through his Son, Jesus Christ: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."¹⁶ The message of love is this: God's love is so great that he was willing to give up his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him will live forever. In this selfless sacrifice, God proves to his

¹³ *Emedicine consumer health* [Web site, cited 5 March 2006]. Online: <http://www.emedicinehealth.com/articles/9844-2.asp>.

¹⁴ Tracy, 173.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ John 3:16.

daughters that he unconditionally loves them. There is no greater expression of love than for one to lay down one's life on behalf of another. And what does a woman need to do to receive this gift of love and eternal life? All she needs to do is believe; she does not have to earn this love, for Jesus has already paid the price at his crucifixion on Calvary.

Love expresses the character of God. The first epistle of John says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."¹⁷ Because God is love, and God's people are created in God's image, they must love one another. This is not an easy task for an abused woman. She has generally not experienced love, so she has a very difficult time loving herself and loving others. This is common and understandable given the abuse. It is extremely difficult to love others when one has not received love from one's significant others. One cannot give out of an empty vessel. This is precisely why an abused woman needs to soak in the truth that God unconditionally loves her before she attempts to love others. She must give herself permission to heal and to take time to grow in the knowledge of God's love before she can unconditionally love others, especially those who have harmed her and hurt her deeply. Furthermore, since love comes from God, she can only love with *agape* love—the Greek word for selfless, sacrificial love—when she allows Christ's love to flow through her to others.

Another powerful biblical truth that will encourage growth in the knowledge of God's love is this: "God chose us in love before the foundations of the world and he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will."¹⁸ God's daughters have received the blessing of being "chosen" in

¹⁷ 1 John 4:7–8.

¹⁸ Eph 1:4.

Christ Jesus before the foundations of the world. God knew them before they were even born and he made the conscious decision to choose them as his own; this is how much God's beloved mean to him. When people come to faith in Christ, they become a part of God's family, a global family on earth and in heaven. Therefore, they do not stand alone; they are adopted into the global family. Prayerfully, the Christian family will learn to reflect this love to those who have been abused.

How does one explain God's love in light of suffering? How does one reconcile the truth that God is love with past or present suffering? First of all, God does not condone violence or abuse, nor does God desire that one suffer abuse in order to be transformed into Jesus' image. God hates violence with a passion. God specifically mandates in his word: "Put away violence and oppression and do what is just and right."¹⁹ Because God is just, God will ultimately bring justice to an unjust situation.

Secondly, when a woman suffers abuse, God has not left her to suffer alone. God as love is there in the midst of even the darkest night of suffering. God's word says:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.²⁰

¹⁹ Ezek 45:9.

²⁰ Rom 8:35–39.

The word “separate” (*chorizo*) in verse 35 means “go away” or “depart.”²¹ Therefore, no matter what form of suffering a woman experiences, God’s love will never “depart” from her. Therefore, when one belongs to Christ, God’s love remains forever.

Thirdly, although God allows suffering, God does not want any of his precious daughters to suffer abuse within the confines of her own home; her home should be a haven of peace and comfort. God will make a way where there seems to be no way for his daughter to receive the help and resources she needs to make sure that the abuse stops or that she finds a refuge from the abuse. Abuse is never all right—it is always a violation against God’s law of love. Love is laying one’s life down on behalf of another, as Christ loved the church. Certainly, love never harms or hurts God’s creation.²²

And fourthly, God knows and understands a woman’s deepest pain. After all, Jesus experienced the horrors of crucifixion, a most shameful and excruciatingly painful death, at the hands of evil people. Jesus then identifies intimately with abuse, savagery, and unjust treatment. Therefore, the message of the cross is a message of an amazing, selfless love that God has for his people. Helping an abused woman embrace the cross of Christ will inevitably help her to connect with a deeply loving, intimate, caring God.

Faithfulness

A second attribute of God that is important for an abused woman to understand and incorporate into her life is faithfulness. God is unswervingly faithful to his own. God’s word says, “Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a

²¹ J. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, Wash.: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

²² See Eph 5:25–33.

thousand generations.”²³ God is faithful, and God shows his faithfulness by keeping his covenant to a thousand generations. A covenant is a promise, and God holds true to his promises forever. The word of God also affirms that “The words of the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.”²⁴ Refined silver is completely pure just as God’s words are pure and perfectly reliable.²⁵ Therefore, this passage affirms God’s faithful word. Although an abused woman may have been let down by many people in her life, God is faithful and his promises are true. She can trust God with her life, with assurance that God will make all things right in his time.

Compassion

A third important attribute for an abused woman to know is God’s compassion. Isaiah reads, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.”²⁶ Isaiah prophesies about Jesus, the coming Messiah, announcing his mission to the church. Jesus came to proclaim the gospel of good news to the poor and the afflicted to help set them free from oppression and sin. Jesus also came to earth to “bind up” the brokenhearted. The word “to bind” (*habash*) means to bandage up a wound.²⁷ Jesus came to heal and to bandage up his children’s wounds because he cares about their every hurt. God is a compassionate God who cares deeply for his own. One can also see God’s compassion for his people in Isaiah 54:7, 10:

²³ Deut 7:9.

²⁴ Ps 12:6.

²⁵ J.F. Walvoord, R.B. Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1983).

²⁶ Isa 61:1–4.

²⁷ R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer., & B.K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999).

For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. . . . For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

An abused woman oftentimes experiences rejection and abandonment from her perpetrators, but God will never reject or abandon her. God is fully aware of her painful heart-wrenching experiences and promises one day to gather her to himself with great compassion. God also promises that even if the mountains depart and the hills are removed, God's love will never depart nor will God's covenant of peace ever be removed because God has compassion on his own.²⁸

Jesus is a perfect reflection of the Father's compassion. The word "compassion" in Greek, *spagchnizomai*, means "bowels" or to be "moved with pity from the depth of one's bowels."²⁹ Jesus demonstrated such gut-wrenching compassion for his children. He came alongside others and entered into their pain and suffering with them. He was always reaching out, healing the sick, casting out demons, and feeding the hungry. His entire ministry centered on meeting the needs of the less fortunate, oppressed, or afflicted. "When he [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."³⁰ "When the Lord saw her [the widow], he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'³¹ Jesus knew the widow's intimate pain of losing her only son after she had already lost her husband, and with great compassion, he immediately raised her son from the dead.

²⁸ Isa 54:10.

²⁹ S. Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 2000).

³⁰ Matt 9:36.

³¹ Luke 7:13.

Jesus cares deeply for his abused daughters; he mourns their losses, weeps for their pain and sorrow, understands their thoughts and emotions, meets them at their point of need, and leads them through a process of healing and restoring them to wholeness in him. He desires an intimate, loving relationship with them, and draws them to himself with compassion. Although abused women have been treated cruelly, God is never cruel. God is and will always be a God of gut-wrenching, heartfelt compassion.

Justice

A fourth attribute that is essential for an abused woman to understand is God's justice. Many women wonder why God allows horrible abuse to occur to the innocent, and why perpetrators seem to get away with hurting God's children. God's daughters live in a fallen world where evil happens. This does not mean that God will allow abusers to get away with their wrongdoing forever. There will be retribution for the wicked, because God is just, and God has to punish unrighteous acts. Ezekiel 45:9 says, "Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough . . . Put away your violence and oppression and do what is just and right." God commands violence and oppression to stop and will see to it that evildoers either change their ways or God will intervene to assure release of the captives.

The Psalmist says: "You are righteous, O LORD, and your judgments are right."³² And John says: "I heard the angel of the waters say, "You are just, O Holy One, who are and were, for you have judged these things; because they shed the blood of saints and prophets, you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"³³ "And I heard the altar respond, 'Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, your judgments are true and just!'"³⁴

³² Ps 119:137.

³³ Rev 16:5.

³⁴ Rev 16:7.

God is a holy and just God, and those who have sinned against God's daughters will one day receive what they deserve. God's daughters can rest secure in this promise.

Holiness

The fifth attribute that is critically important for an abused woman to understand is holiness.³⁵ God's daughters struggle with believing they are holy. What does it mean to be "holy"? The command "be holy as I am holy" appears for the very first time in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. Leviticus 20:26 says, "You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine." Scholars refer to Leviticus as the book for holy living because it contains all of the moral and ritual laws that were given for Israel to obey so that she would be set apart from all other nations.³⁶

What does it mean that God is holy? God appeared to Israel on Mt. Sinai with thunder and lightning and in a thick cloud, and with a trumpet blast so loud that all the people trembled while the whole mountain shook violently.³⁷ God's people were filled with fear and awe at his appearance. God is set apart from the common; God is set apart from sin. There is no one like God. Moses experienced God's holiness. He exclaims, "God is awesome in splendor, doing wonders."³⁸ Hannah knew God's holiness as well, for she says, "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you. . . ." ³⁹ But is it possible for God's children to reflect his holiness? In the beginning, God created his children to reflect his perfect image. However, the fall occurred, Adam and Eve sinned in

³⁵ Tracy, 173.

³⁶ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Revell Bible Dictionary* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1984), 635–36.

³⁷ Exod 19:16–18.

³⁸ Exod 15:11.

³⁹ 1 Sam 2:2.

the garden, and God's children could no longer reflect God's perfect image—only a tarnished image. God sent Jesus Christ to die for the sins of each of his children so that they could be reconciled to the Father. Jesus came to restore the broken image by saving his people and making them holy as he is. God's abused daughters do not believe that they can attain holiness; they suffer from shame resulting from their abuse, and feel anything but holy. But God is not like their earthly abusive fathers nor he is like their earthly abusive husbands; God is trustworthy and loving and will make sure that the sin that was perpetrated against them is punished.⁴⁰ God is holy, separate from the common and separate from sin. God sees his daughters as holy and pure as they are a reflection of him. God desires that they see themselves the way God sees them: as holy vessels created for his honor and glory.

When a woman grows in biblical truth, when she has a more accurate perception of God's character, she can know herself better. The Bible is "the only unmarred mirror into which we can look to see God, ourselves and others."⁴¹ When a woman's image of God is healed, her self-image will also be healed. Then she will wholeheartedly believe what God's word says about her: that she is worthy to receive all that God has for her in the way of love, honor, provision, intimacy (with God and others), blessings, purpose, and destiny. Moreover, when she has a more accurate understanding of God's attributes, she will be able to reflect more accurately the different aspects of the image of God. She will then understand better her identity as a child of the living God.

⁴⁰ Tracy, 174.

⁴¹ Sandra Wilson and Gary R. Collins, eds., *Counseling Adult Children of Alcoholics: Resources for Christian Counseling* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 123.

Living in Freedom

The word tells us that Jesus came to set the captives free.⁴² What does this mean? Freedom can take many forms. Jesus came to free captives from sin. Jesus also desires to free captives from oppression. Isaiah 61:1 says, “He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed.” The Lord desires that his daughters live in freedom from any kind of oppression, be it emotional, spiritual, or physical. When a woman is experiencing abuse of any form, she is living in oppression. The Hebrew root word for oppression, *ana*, in Isaiah 61:1b means to “force one to submit” or to “inflict undue pain.”⁴³ God does not want his daughters to live this way. He wants to release them from unhealthy ties that keep them in unnecessary bondage. Sometimes, it takes learning to set healthy boundaries and learning to care for oneself in order for an abused woman to thrive and be the woman God created her to be. Exodus 3:6–9 says:

He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.”

In this passage, we see that God not only wants to deliver his children out of oppressive circumstances, but also wants to bring them into a good and broad place, a land flowing with milk and honey. What is a “land flowing with milk and honey”? Milk, next to bread, was the second most important staple in the life of the Israelites.⁴⁴ When a nation had

⁴² Luke 4:18.

⁴³ Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic edition.

⁴⁴ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedia Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures and Literary Patterns of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 488.

plenty of milk, they lived in abundance.⁴⁵ Milk symbolizes God's abundant provision for his people. Honey, on the other hand, was a rare commodity in Israel.⁴⁶ It was a delicacy or something that the people desired.⁴⁷ Therefore, God not only wanted to bring his people out of oppressive living so that they could live in abundance, but he wanted even more for them—he wanted to meet their deeper desires. The total image of “milk and honey” represents a picture of complete satisfaction in Christ.⁴⁸ God allows suffering, but there is always a higher purpose in one's suffering. Could it be that God desires his daughters to know and experience complete satisfaction in Christ?

Freedom to Embrace One's God-given Emotions

Abused women also find it difficult to live free from unwanted, painful emotions caused by memories of abuse. But is it possible to learn to express and process one's God-given emotions freely and positively? Survivors of abuse may experience a wide range of negative emotions, and oftentimes they do not possess the tools to process them in healthy and constructive ways. Rather than trying to understand why they feel the way they do and what they can do to change things, they often numb out their feelings or repress them so they do not have to feel painful, confusing, and unwanted emotions such as anger, bitterness, resentment, hatred, shame, and guilt. Unfortunately, many abused women end up hurting themselves further. What does the Bible say to God's children to encourage a healthy expression of their God-given emotions? And what does the Bible say about God desiring wholeness for his children?

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The biblical story of Hannah illustrates how important it is to express one's authentic feelings and emotions before God and how oftentimes one's thoughts affect one's feelings. First Samuel 1 recounts Hannah's story:

Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. . . . On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. . . . Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad?" . . . She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. . . . But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.⁴⁹

Hannah petitioned God over her barrenness as she poured out her soul to God.

Hannah's prayer to God is a prayer of lament containing several key elements.⁵⁰ Hannah petitioned God, asking him to look upon the misery of his servant and to remember her by delivering her from her barren condition. Peninnah, her husband's second wife, had already borne him children. Hannah in her lament motivated God to hear her and answer her. She knew that God was her only hope in delivering her from her barrenness. The most astounding part of her prayer of lament is when Hannah suddenly believed that God had heard her prayer. When this occurred, Hannah's feelings of sadness immediately turned to joy; Hannah's grief and suffering were exchanged for divine joy and complete

⁴⁹ 1 Sam 1:2–18.

⁵⁰ A lament has eight elements attributed to it, and the structure generally appears as follows: the real-life situation of the supplicant, address, complaint, petition, motivation, vow, assurance of being heard, and thanksgiving. For a more complete understanding, see A. H. Van Zyl, "1 Samuel 1:2–11: A Life-World Lament of Affliction," *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 12 (1984): 151–61.

confidence in God. How does one know that this “assurance of being heard” had happened? Even before Hannah conceived, her countenance was no longer sad.

The story of Hannah affirms that God encourages and welcomes his children to embrace and express their true emotions openly and honestly, including their most painful and distressing ones. In addition, this passage demonstrates how one’s thoughts affect the way one feels. When Hannah trusted God, she was able to relax, and her countenance reflected her faith and hope in God. A healthy expression of one’s feelings, no matter how profoundly painful and negative they are, is the way to emotional freedom. To foster such emotional freedom in abused women is one way of giving excellent pastoral care.

Freedom to Forgive

Another area of struggle for an abused woman is the act of freely forgiving her perpetrator. Although God commands forgiveness,⁵¹ an abused woman should never be forced to forgive her perpetrator. Firstly, forgiveness is a process. In order to be able to forgive freely, an abused woman must understand how her perpetrator’s sin has harmed and damaged her and how much the abuse has affected her life.⁵² In other words, a woman must understand what she is actually forgiving before attempting to forgive. Secondly, an abused woman is able to forgive even if her debtor has never taken ownership for his sin—even if he never admits or confesses his wrongdoing. There does not need to be full reconciliation and restoration of a relationship to forgive. Therefore, forgiveness can be one-sided, because ultimately an abused woman’s heart is accountable

⁵¹ Matt 6:12.

⁵² The author has an in-depth understanding of forgiveness as a result of facilitating support groups for survivors of abuse for three years. For an excellent and thorough understanding of the forgiveness process, read Chapter 10, “Forgiveness,” in Tracy’s *Mending the Soul*.

to God alone. Forgiveness is faith in action, because when one forgives a crime perpetrated against oneself, one is acting on the belief that God will ultimately bring judgment and justice.⁵³ Thirdly, releasing one's debtor is in no way letting a perpetrator "off the hook" or exonerating him from any retribution. What he did was sinful, and the Lord will judge him for his wrongdoing. The Lord's Prayer is a reminder of the importance of daily forgiveness in one's life: "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors."⁵⁴ Forgiveness should be a part of an abused woman's daily prayer life, and it is freeing when one is finally able, through the mercy and grace of God, to forgive someone from the heart.

Discovering One's Call

God desires that his daughters live in freedom in Christ—to be the women God created them to be. Freedom in Christ includes using all of one's gifts and abilities to serve God. No matter what an abused woman has had to endure in life, no matter how difficult or painful her circumstances have been, one thing is certain: God is able to bring glory out of her suffering. Nothing she has gone through is without meaning and purpose. When an abused woman finds meaning and purpose in her suffering, it deeply encourages her and gives her hope to continue on her journey. Discovering meaning and purpose in one's life has a lot to do with discovering one's call. God has created his children in his own image, and, in doing so, has uniquely gifted each one.

⁵³ Tracy, 187.

⁵⁴ Matt 6:12.

God says in his word, “For in him we live and move and have our being.”⁵⁵ It is in Christ that God’s children live, move, and find their very existence. Moreover, God’s word says, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand in order that we might *walk* in them.”⁵⁶ God’s daughters have been created to walk in the good works that God prepared in advance for them to do.⁵⁷ Each of God’s daughters has a unique call for her life, and, therefore, she must take action in order to walk in her calling.

Arthur Miller says, “Giftedness is who we are by nature. It is what makes us *us*. It is the way we were designed to function, and therefore the way we actually do function best and with the greatest delight.”⁵⁸ “Giftedness is more than a mere inventory of talents. It is the lifeblood of a person, the song that her heart longs to sing, the race that her legs long to run.”⁵⁹ God has uniquely gifted each of his daughters and desires that each use her gifts to fulfill her destiny. This is freeing when a woman finally discovers her identity in Christ and is able to implement her gifts in her life calling.

In seeking to discover one’s God-given call, one must ask herself, “What do I do well and what gives me pleasure?”⁶⁰ God wants his daughters to enjoy using their gifts as they serve him with their life’s work. And no matter what pain or suffering they have experienced, there is nothing that can keep them from realizing God’s call and destiny for their lives. God created each person with her own unique mapping (pattern of functioning)

⁵⁵ Acts 17:28.

⁵⁶ Eph 2:10, literal translation, emphasis added.

⁵⁷ This is what it means to fulfill the functional aspect of God as discussed on page 27.

⁵⁸ Arthur F. Miller Jr., *The Power of Uniqueness: How to Become Who You Really Are* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 32.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 37.

and motivation, and no life circumstance can repress her natural and innate giftedness.⁶¹ God's daughters are who they are, by God's design. And God can and will take even the most painful, heartbreaking experiences in life and turn them around so that abundant blessings flow forth out of the suffering giving glory to God.

Conclusion

The effects of abuse are life-shattering, and a woman who has experienced such pain and suffering deserves to be treated with unconditional love, acceptance, patience, and tender care. If a minister truly desires to help heal the damage done by abuse, he or she can begin by integrating into his or her ministry to abused women the biblical and theological truths explored here.

What are the meaningful and life-transforming truths that will help facilitate recovery and restoration in God's daughters? God's daughters, created in God's own image, are accepted in the beloved, they are unconditionally loved and accepted by God, and when this truth becomes reality in their hearts, they can stand strong and secure in their identities in Christ. And as they understand better Christ's mission—to set captives free—they can embrace the freedom that is theirs, no longer enduring oppressive conditions, but breaking free to live abundant and satisfying lives in Christ. This abundant life includes freedom from debilitating sin, an authentic expression of self, the grace to forgive, an intimate relationship with Christ, and pursuing their life call by using their gifts, talents, and experiences to fulfill their God-ordained destinies bringing unending glory and honor to God.

⁶¹ Ibid., 78.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The research done for this thesis included a wide array of books, articles, seminary papers, and personal interviews. The literature review, however, includes only the resources that were most helpful in formulating and developing this thesis. Women abuse is a serious problem in the church, and anyone attempting to do justice on behalf of God's daughters needs to understand deeply the various issues related to abuse. There are many issues related to abuse of women; therefore, it made sense to break down the literature review into four categories. The categories are: 1) understanding abuse, 2) the clergy's response to abuse of women, 3) the historical precedents behind the church's mistreatment of women, and 4) hope and healing for abused Christian women.

Understanding Abuse

The resources in this category help the reader to understand better the nature and effects of abuse.

The most outstanding work used in helping to lay the biblical and theological framework and the project design for this thesis was Steven Tracy's *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse*.¹ This book is a one-of-a-kind resource that addresses many of the issues involved in abuse and encompasses at least two of the categories in this literature review: understanding abuse, and hope and healing for abused Christian women. Tracy discusses in detail five different forms of abuse: sexual, physical, neglect,

¹ Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding Abuse and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

spiritual, and verbal. He then explains in depth the nature and effects of these forms of abuse. For example, he shares how the image of God is grossly distorted by abuse, and how difficult it is for an abused woman to know and experience God's true nature. In writing about the effects of abuse, he includes the problems of shame, powerlessness, and isolation that women face in the aftermath of abuse. Tracy then offers wise counsel in helping abused women overcome these common problems.

Tracy writes with authority and sensitivity, both as an academic who teaches theology and biblical ethics, and as a trained, professional counselor of fifteen years who specializes in abuse and sexuality. This professional combination gives him an edge on understanding the dynamics of abuse in order to help others provide loving, compassionate pastoral care to abused women and to enable them to foster hope and healing in God's daughters.

An article that the author found most helpful in understanding the effects of abuse was "Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Exploratory Study in an Underresearched Area," by Donna Kane, Sharon E Cheston, and Joanne Greer.² Tracy's *Mending the Soul* is a comprehensive study of the nature and effects of multiple forms of abuse, and includes a small section of survivors' perceptions of God, whereas "Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse" focuses specifically on survivors' perceptions of God. The study compared adult women survivors of childhood and adolescent incest, perpetrated by a father figure, with adult women who were not abused. The findings were significant and, in many ways, similar to

² Donna Kane, Sharon E Cheston, and Joanne Greer, "Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Exploratory Study in an Underresearched Area," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 21.3 (1993): 228-37.

what Tracy uncovered in his research.³ Survivors see God as more distant, unavailable, and unloving compared to non-survivors. Because of their understandable false images of God, they struggle with trusting God. Although the authors discovered that 27% of their abused interviewees had left their faith communities because of their abuse, many respondents still expressed a deep need to be involved in a faith community. This study affirms the need for pastors to be proactive in ministering with understanding, patient, unconditional love and good biblical teaching to help heal abused women's self-images and distorted images of God.

Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse by Grant L. Martin⁴ is a helpful resource, not only to deepen one's understanding of the nature and effects of spousal and child abuse, but also to learn best how to offer wise, sensitive, and biblical counsel to abused Christian women and children. Martin, a trained psychologist, says, "Even if abuse is not fatal, it's an affront to human dignity. It denies the integrity and value of the person who is harmed, even if the offender doesn't seem to care. Whether within the home or on the streets, violence is in total contradiction to the Christian message of love and respect for one another."⁵ Martin takes a more clinical approach than Tracy does by presenting the basic components of family violence, defining and giving a history of each type of abuse, and then offering specific advice to counselors and pastors on how to offer good counsel to both the abused and abuser. Tracy's work gives a theological and biblical exegesis of the problem of abuse and, additionally, offers tools for healing and recovery

³ Tracy, 173.

⁴ Grant L. Martin, *Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse* (Waco: Word Books, 1987).

⁵ Ibid., 14.

from the abuse. *Counseling for Family Violence and Abuse* is written for the professional, while *Mending the Soul* is written for both professionals and laypersons.

The Clergy's Response to Abuse of Women

The resources in this category helped the author lay out the problem and its setting for her thesis—the lack of pastoral care to abused Christian women in the evangelical church.

Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know by Rev. Al Miles⁶ is an outstanding practical resource written for pastors and other Christian leaders to help them realize the scope and magnitude of the problem of women abuse that exists within the walls of their own churches. Miles writes with passion about the existing problem, hoping to enlighten the hearts and minds of pastors by offering practical wisdom and an excellent biblical and theological framework that will enable them to minister loving care to the abused Christian woman.

Miles brings fresh insight and understanding to many of the misinterpreted Scripture passages used by many uninformed pastors who have enabled women to stay with their abusive husbands even in the face of violence. His work includes such topics as headship, equality, submission, and divorce. Moreover, a whole section is devoted to offering interested pastors ways to care effectively for abused women.

Domestic Violence includes many personal stories of women who have suffered abuse at the hands of their own husbands, and each story dishearteningly includes the unhelpful, inappropriate responses received by their own pastors. Miles sadly reports:

⁶ Rev. Al Miles, *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

Most of the fifty-two survivors I interviewed were angered, disappointed, and hurt by the ways in which clergy people responded to their reports of abuse. The survivors believe that ordained ministers do not provide appropriate or consistent care to victims, misinterpret Scripture to support male domination and female subjugation, blame victims for their abuse, hesitate to confront perpetrators, deny the prevalence of domestic violence within their own congregations, and pressure victims to stay in dangerous marriages.⁷

Miles' work is a catalyst for encouraging the work that God requires of his church—to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God.⁸

Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home by James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf⁹ was written to alert the Christian community to the existing problem of wife abuse in the Christian family, to advocate for abused women, and to help pastors lovingly care for abused women. Like Miles' work, this book includes dozens of stories of women who have suffered abuse by husbands who, in many cases, were actively serving in churches as ordained pastors, elders, or deacons. The Alsurfs share the shocking responses that abused women received from ordained pastors and trained Christian psychologists, whom they desperately sought out for help. One woman who went to three pastors for help shared, “All three pastors said a man was ‘head of the family’ and I must endure whatever he did.”¹⁰

The Alsurfs, in attempting to help pastors minister more effectively, offer insight into the family backgrounds, personalities, and mindsets of abused Christian women, and the reasons why many stay in abusive marriages. An important thing they learned in doing their research is that most abused women are “intelligent, well-educated, competent people who held responsible jobs,” and they “appeared” to be similar to other

⁷ Ibid., 93.

⁸ Mic 6:8.

⁹ James Alsdurf and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission: The Tragedy of Wife Abuse in the Christian Home* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

people.¹¹ However, “this appearance was mostly maintained at great psychological cost.”¹²

Similar to Miles, the Alsdurfs tackle the biblical headship and submission issue. They explain that many abused women stay far too long in abusive marriages because of false teaching that says a woman must submit and obey her husband at all costs, even if it means her life.

“The Process of Recovery and Rebuilding among Abused Women in the Conservative Evangelical Subculture” by Norman Giesbrecht and Irene Sevcik¹³ is a thought-provoking article about the recovery of five abused Christian women within the context of the evangelical church subculture. Giesbrecht and Sevcik accompany these five women through a research process of “iterative cycles of in-depth interview, thematic analysis, theory building, and validation” for a certain length of time. The findings are similar to the results of Miles’ and the Aldurfs’ research regarding the lack of pastoral care and understanding of the abuse—all five of the women sadly shared that their pastors reinforced the traditional gender roles, exacerbating their experiences of “inequality and injustice” within their marriages rather than providing the love and assistance they so desperately needed.

¹¹ Ibid., 35.

¹² Ibid., 36.

¹³ Norman Giesbrecht and Irene Sevcik, “The Process of Recovery and Rebuilding among Abused Women in the Conservative Evangelical Subculture,” *Journal of Family Violence*, 15.3 (2000): 229–42.

The Historical Precedent Behind the Church's Mistreatment of Women

The resources in this category are used to explain the history behind the mistreatment of women in the church and the reasons why so many pastors have not ministered well to abused women.

Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present by Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld¹⁴ is a superb historical account of women's ministry from Jesus' time to the present. This invaluable resource, although written to explain the significant role that women played throughout the history of the church, additionally sheds light on the false teachings of the church that have negatively influenced the way clergy viewed women and thus have led to lack of good pastoral care to abused women.

Tucker and Liefeld include numerous injurious statements and comments about women by many influential leaders throughout church history. Among the comments are the often-quoted words of the church father Tertullian, who says, "You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law; you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack."¹⁵ And in their historical record of women's ministry in the twentieth century, they include the comments of John Rice, who says, "A woman is not made so much in the image of God, but in the image and as a mate to man. . . . Blessed is the woman that remembers this; her glory is in being a help to a man, and in submission to her husband or her father."¹⁶

¹⁴ Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

¹⁵ Ibid., 103.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Daughters of the Church was the primary resource used for understanding the historical precedent behind women abuse in the church because of its rich comprehensive history of women and ministry.

Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions by Roland De Vaux¹⁷ is a biblical resource based on the Old Testament, archeological evidence, and an historical study of ancient Israel. This gem of a resource includes a wealth of information on the family, civil, military, and religious institutions. The short section on the position of women in Old Testament times was used to understand better the thinking of first-century Jewish leaders who influenced the treatment of women in Israel and in other parts of the world. De Vaux, basing his writing on the historical record found in the Law, says that women in ancient Israel were considered their husbands' possessions. *Ancient Israel* states that a woman could not legally obtain a writ of divorce, even if her husband was unbearably abusive, nor could she inherit her husband's property, unless she was the only remaining heir. Women referred to their husbands as "lord" or "master," just as slaves did. It follows that, in Old Testament times, women often were relegated to the same social class as that of slaves. De Vaux's section on the position of women would help any serious student understand better the role and treatment of women in ancient Israel.

Nancy Nason-Clark's *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence*¹⁸ was written to encourage the religious community and secular institutions to work together to prevent violence against women. Nason-Clark's work consists of extensive research: six different research studies, each of which includes "survey data,

¹⁷ Roland DeVaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

¹⁸ Nancy Nason-Clark, *The Battered Wife: How Christians Confront Family Violence* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press Publishing, 1997).

focus group discussions, participant observations and in-depth interviews”¹⁹ from thousands of clergy people, victims, members of congregations, women’s groups, and youth.

Nason-Clark also discusses the low view of women held by many contemporary Christian writers, and how their prominence within conservative Protestantism perpetuates violence against women. Unfortunately, the majority of these writers understand men as “aggressive, dominant, logical, independent, active, ambitious and task-oriented” and women as “submissive, intuitive, dependent, nurturant, supportive, patient and person-oriented,” reinforcing hierarchy and male dominance within the marriage relationship and exacerbating the abuse of women.

Nason-Clark’s work, although written to confront family violence, confirms—just as Tucker and Liefeld’s work does—the reality that wrong teachings misguide and misinform pastors, disabling them from being the pastoral caregivers that abused Christian women need. A big difference, however, is that *The Battered Wife* deals with more contemporary teachings and writings on women and marriage, while *Daughters of the Church* deals with the two-thousand-year history of teachings on women and ministry.

Hope and Healing for Abused Christian Women

The resources in this category were used to learn how ministers facilitate healing and offer hope to abused Christian women. These resources were also used to help the author write her project: a Bible study, *Accepted in the Beloved*, specifically designed to

¹⁹ Ibid., xvii.

encourage healing and to help the abused woman understand and experience the depths of God's love and acceptance.

Mending the Soul by Steven Tracy,²⁰ as reviewed in the first section on understanding abuse, was a key resource used to learn more about healing from abuse. Tracy includes an entire chapter on facing one's brokenness, and, within the chapter, he outlines six stages of healing. Tracy also writes an insightful, sensitive, and helpful chapter on forgiveness, bringing a deeper understanding to the whole area of forgiveness in an abused woman's life. Tracy argues, "Abuse victims need clear direction about the biblical doctrine of forgiveness and what it means for their relational healing. More specifically, they need to know what Christian forgiveness means for their relationships with their abusers, particularly if an abuser is unrepentant."²¹ In addition, Tracy writes a section called "Reconnecting with God" in order to help abused women develop intimacy with God. Tracy insightfully shares that an abused Christian woman needs to understand the true character of God, because abuse grossly distorts a woman's image of God. Tracy includes a chart listing specific attributes of God, and, next to each attribute, he records the common distortions formed by abuse. *Mending the Soul* is one of the best published works on helping ministers or other caregivers understand how to work sensitively and proactively toward mending the soul of an abuse survivor.

Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging by Brennan Manning²² is an excellent resource written for those who long to know and experience the Father's unconditional love and acceptance. Manning is one of the most authentic Christian

²⁰ Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 181.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child, The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

writers of the twenty-first century, and, in *Abba's Child*, he explains how sharing one's pain, heartache, disappointments, frustrations, and unwanted emotions unreservedly with God leads to a more intimate, loving relationship. He believes that God already knows his children inside and out, and hiding true feelings and emotions from God will only perpetuate one's self-rejection. Although *Abba's Child* is not written specifically for the abused, the wealth of insight it offers will help any survivor embrace her brokenness and pain, opening the way for a deeper level of healing and wholeness. Manning says, "The self-acceptance that flows from embracing my core identity as Abba's child enables me to encounter my utter brokenness with uncompromising honesty and complete abandon to the mercy of God."²³ Manning's purpose in writing is to create a passion in the hearts of God's children for the true God of Scripture.

A similar work is called *Into Abba's Arms, Finding the Acceptance You've Always Wanted* by Sandra D. Wilson.²⁴ Wilson, a psychologist, writes as a professional who has had years of experience in counseling women, but she also writes from her own personal history, giving the book an authentic, intimate touch. *Into Abba's Arms* is written for those who have suffered from abandonment issues stemming from one's family background, and for those who also desire to develop a more intimate relationship with a God whom they are learning to trust. Wilson says, "My identity rests in the unshakable love of my Abba, to whom I eternally belong. That's why I believe that intimacy with God is the key to transforming misshapen identities and entire lives."²⁵

²³ Ibid., 74.

²⁴ Sandra Wilson, *Into Abba's Arms, Finding the Acceptance You've Always Wanted* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1998).

²⁵ Ibid., 87.

Healing the Hurting: Giving Hope & Help to Abused Women, edited by Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck,²⁶ is a collection of essays addressing the practical needs of abused women. *Healing the Hurting* is divided into two parts: “All the Hurting” and “And the Healing.” Many of the essays include personal testimonies from abuse survivors who offer practical wisdom through their own life experiences to help facilitate hope and healing in God’s daughters. One superb essay, called “From Victim to Survivor and Beyond” by Anne Findlay Chamberlain, explains the effects of sexual abuse—including emotional, spiritual, and physical—and what survivors can do to foster their own healing and recovery. She suggests that before a woman can begin her healing process, she must choose healing; healing is a choice.

Another essay, “Group Work with Evangelical Abused Wives” by Mary Williams, shares the value of working together in a small group setting. The author says that abused women working in a group often feel understood, believed, and accepted. They are empowered in making their own decisions and taking control of their own lives. And their self-esteem improves through group work as they hear, validate, love, and accept one another.

Summary

The books and articles reviewed for this thesis are only a sampling of the books available on the topic of abuse of women, but these were the primary resources used to help the author formulate and develop her thesis. For a more comprehensive list of books on the various categories of abuse, see the bibliography.

²⁶ Catherine Clark Kroeger and James R. Beck, *Healing the Hurting, Giving Hope & Help to Abused Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

Chapter 4

Project Design

One of the greatest needs in an abused woman's life is the need to grow in comprehending God's unconditional love and acceptance. Growth in love and acceptance is foundational for an abused woman's healing, recovery, and fruitful future ministry. This thesis project was birthed from prayer and a desire to help survivors of abuse to know and experience the depth of God's love so that they can be all that God wants them to be. Because the research shows that most pastors do not adequately minister to abused women, the author saw the creation of the *Accepted in the Beloved* Bible study as a tool for pastors to provide good pastoral care to abused (or formerly abused) women attending their churches.

The project was conducted in three phases over a four-year period. The first phase, in 2002, was to gather a small group of women from Pilgrim Church in Beverly, Massachusetts, who desired to grow in God's love and acceptance, and to write a six-week Bible study to help them achieve their desire. This initial group experience would be the pilot study for the Bible study, to determine what changes would be necessary to make it more usable and effective.

The second phase, in 2004, was to travel to Uganda and Rwanda, Africa, to minister God's love and acceptance and to teach on gender equality to women who suffered deeply through war, genocide, polygamy, multiple abuse, and unjust cultural practices. Rather than facilitate a six-week Bible study, the author taught the same material in a conference setting due to the time constraints of the trip. The third phase, in

2006, was to gather a second group of women from Pilgrim Church and from the Gordon-Conwell community who had suffered through either childhood or adulthood abuse, and to lead them through a revised and formatted six-week Bible study called *Accepted in the Beloved*. The purpose was to help the women grow in understanding and experiencing God's love and acceptance in order to bring further healing and transformation in their lives, so that they will be unhindered in fulfilling their calling. In addition, the author desired that the group evaluate the study to see what additional changes may need to be made to prepare the study for further ministry to women.

Phase I—Pilot Bible Study at Pilgrim Church

The *Accepted in the Beloved* Bible study was held in the fall of 2002 at Pilgrim Church. The group met every Thursday from 3:00 to 5:00 P.M. for eight weeks. The group began with nine women and ended with seven, because two of the women had to move unexpectedly out of state. The women were from all different backgrounds and educational levels. Three were college graduates, one was working on a bachelor's degree, and three were high school graduates. All came from dysfunctional families where their basic love needs went unmet. Although two of the women had pastors for fathers, their family systems were highly dysfunctional. Two of the women had been sexually abused as young adults, and at least two had experienced domestic violence.

The Bible study was designed to help the women grow in understanding and experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance, and to help them move from cognitive knowledge to heart knowledge in understanding God's love. This particular group had already been working together as a small group; therefore, a cohesive bond

already existed, allowing for openness, trust, and intimacy within the group. The Bible study included six lessons; however, the group met for eight weeks. The first week was used to pray and to give an overview and expectations of the Bible study, and the last week was used for a time of processing.

The first lesson, “God’s Accepts Us As We Are,” defined God’s acceptance and drove home the important biblical truth that God’s acceptance is based on grace and not on one’s perfect behavior. The second lesson, “God’s Acceptance Is Eternal,” further developed the concept of God’s love and acceptance by teaching on God’s covenant theology and helping the women to understand that God’s covenant is unconditional and eternal. The third lesson, “Accepted in the Image of God,” taught what it means to be created in God’s image. Its purpose was to help the women understand their identity in Christ. The fourth lesson, “You Are Beautiful in God’s Sight,” taught the women to accept themselves as God’s creation, both physically and spiritually. The fifth lesson, “God’s Acceptance Encourages Healthy Thinking and Feeling,” taught how to identify unhealthy thinking patterns, in order to encourage them that, with God’s help, they can change their unpleasant and damaging emotions into more positive and life-renewing ones. The sixth lesson, “God’s Acceptance Enables Abundant Living,” encouraged the women to embrace their identity in Christ and not to allow anything to hinder them from living the abundant life that Christ came to give them. The outcomes of this study will be discussed in chapter 5.

The *Accepted in the Beloved* Bible study was completely revised for the third phase of this project; therefore, each chapter of the study will be outlined in more detail in phase III of the project design.

Phase II—Short-Term Mission Trip to Rwanda and Uganda, Africa

For the second phase of the project, the message of God's love and acceptance was taken to two third-world nations, Rwanda and Uganda, where women are desperate to learn this truth. The purpose of this short-term mission trip was to minister God's love and acceptance, teach gender equality, understand better women abuse in a third-world context, and to be equipped for future ministry to internationals—especially because the author of this thesis pastors a multicultural church. In January 2004, a ministry team of seven men and women from Finland, the United States, and Africa, working through World Shine Ministries, a Uganda-based evangelistic ministry, brought this message of love and gender equality to more than three thousand women (men and children also attended) scarred by war, genocide, polygamy, multiple abuse, and unjust cultural practices. Five different women's conferences with the theme Setting the Captives Free were held—four in Uganda and one in Rwanda.

Preparation for the Trip

In preparation for the trip to East Africa, the author read the following books: *Total Forgiveness: When Everything in You Wants To Hold A Grudge*,¹ *Surviving Without Romance: African Women Tell Their Stories*,² *Shepherding a Women's Heart: A New Model for Effective Ministry to Women*,³ and *How People Grow: What the Bible*

¹ R. T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness: When Everything in You Wants to Hold a Grudge* (Lake Mary, Fla.: Charisma House, 2001).

² Mary Lou Cummings, *Surviving without Romance: African Women Tell Their Stories* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald Press, 1991).

³ Beverly White Hislop, *Shepherding a Woman's Heart, A New Model for Effective Ministry to Women* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003).

Reveals About Personal Growth.⁴ Travel guides and online articles were also consulted, to understand more about what happened during and after the War of 1994 and to learn more about the Ugandan people. Pilgrim Church also partners with InterPrayer, a network of prayer leaders with a mission to mobilize prayer and help fuel world revival, and two of the prayer leaders are from Uganda. Therefore, the author had some acquaintance with Ugandans and had inquired of these leaders about ministry to women in their nation.

Mary Lou Cummings, author of *Surviving without Romance* and someone who lived and ministered in East Africa with her family in the 1980s, was consulted for further information and wisdom about ministering to African women.

The ministry team taught on the following topics:

- God's unconditional love and acceptance
- Biblical oneness between men and women
- Freedom in Christ
- Reconciliation between God and humanity
- Rejection and redemption
- Love and hatred—the call to love
- The power of prayer and community

The author also had the opportunity to preach in St. John's Parish, a local church in Kampala, Uganda. At the end of the trip, she returned to the same parish to share her personal testimony along with other team members. The material taught at each conference was the same, but varied a bit depending upon the need and the time allotted.

⁴ John Townsend and Henry Cloud, *How People Grow, What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

Conference Settings

The mission trip consisted of five women's conferences (men and children attended as well) that were well attended; the number of women who came was beyond the team's wildest dreams, expectations, and prayers.

The setting for each conference was the same: a contemporary polar structure of preacher/teacher and audience. Because of the large audiences at some events and the need for translators, the team thought that this was the best way to deliver the various messages.

The first conference was held at St. John's Church in Kampala, Uganda, where a team of three women spoke to one hundred fifty-six men, women, and children. The conference was held outdoors under a straw thatched roof. A team of three women took turns teaching on a variety of topics and, at the end of the conference, all the women present were invited to come to the altar for healing and laying on of hands. Almost every woman came forward to receive prayer.

The second conference was in Mbarara, Uganda, in which the team led a one-day seminar sponsored by Life Ministries, an international ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ, to eighty professional women. The conference was held in a converted warehouse and was very well received.

From Mbarara, the team traveled to Nyakatare, Rwanda, where they taught another one-day conference at Nyakatare-Gahini Diocese for about two hundred men, women, and children—survivors of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Since most structures in Rwanda were razed during the genocide of 1994, this church compound was newly constructed. It was reminiscent of an Indian reservation where the people lived close to

the earth, growing their own crops and creating their own linens and clothing. In the evening, an open-air evangelistic service was held with several hundred people in attendance. At least thirty-one people, mostly children, received Christ.

The fourth conference was held in a very large Anglican church in Bushenyi, Uganda, at the top of a mountain. The team was privileged to speak to more than two thousand men, women, and children who were packed in waiting to hear the messages prepared for them.

The fifth conference was at Kati Town, West Ankole Parish, Uganda, also at the peak of a mountain. The team traveled on a dirt road for more than two hours from the town center before reaching the church where more than one hundred men, women, and children were waiting for the ministry time.

Phase III—Small Group Bible Study for *Accepted in the Beloved*

The last phase of the project, another small group Bible study with the revised *Accepted in the Beloved* study, was held from January 16 through February 27, 2006. Because the author's research revealed a lack of pastoral care available to abused women, this study was one way of providing love, acceptance, understanding, and practical help to abused Christian women.

Accepted in the Beloved was rewritten and formatted based on feedback from the first group of women. A small group of four women participated in the study and met in a lovely, contemplative environment in one of the women's homes in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. The group met for six weeks, and the facilitator (author of thesis) agreed to pray for each woman for the duration of the study. All the women were, or had been,

part of the Gordon-Conwell community through work or study. All but one woman had a master's degree or were studying for one; therefore, all were highly educated. One woman was in her 30s, two were in their 40s, and one was in her mid-60s. Two of the women had suffered childhood abuse from alcoholic parents. One had suffered childhood abuse through rejection by her mother, and one had suffered from living with an abusive spouse for more than forty years. Before the first meeting, the facilitator handed out a questionnaire (Appendix A-1) to understand better the women participating in the study, determine their understanding of God, discover any existing blocks to knowing and experiencing God's love and acceptance, and identify their greatest desire in their relationships to God. Additionally, the women were asked if they had ever been able to share their pain and struggles with their pastors.

The format for each of the six weekly lessons included three different sections: Learning God's Truth, Experiencing God, and Sharing God's Love. Learning God's Truth was designed to take the women through a study of God's word to enlighten their minds to God's truth. The second section, Experiencing God, was designed to help the group experience God through contemplative exercises in order to foster deeper heart knowledge of God's truth and spiritual transformation. Sharing God's Love, the third section, was designed to help the women reach out beyond themselves and apply what they had learned. The faded rose, a symbol of God's love, is placed throughout each chapter of the study to indicate a break in the study and to provide a space to journal or reflect any thoughts or feelings that arise during the exercises.

Accepted in the Beloved is based on Ephesians 1:6, which says, "To the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."

The six lessons taught were as follows (see Appendix D for complete Bible Study):

Lesson I: Chosen in Love

- I. Learning God's Truth
 - A. God is love
 - B. Blocks to knowing and experiencing God's love
 - C. God's spiritual blessings
 - D. God's daughters as overcomers
- II. Experiencing God
- III. Sharing God's Love

Lesson II: My Image, a Reflection of God

- I. Learning God's Truth
 - A. Created in the image of God
- II. Experiencing God
 - A. Mirror exercise
 - B. Contemplative exercise—Five minutes of silence and solitude
- III. Sharing God's Love—Pray each day for anyone who needs to know that he or she is fearfully and wonderfully made

Lesson III: God's True Nature

- I. Learning God's Truth
 - A. Distorted images of God
 - B. God's nature
- II. Experiencing God—Centering prayer exercise
- III. Sharing God's Love—Share one of God's attributes with one in need

Lesson IV: Embracing Your God-given Emotions

- I. Learning God's Truth
 - A. Our thoughts and beliefs affect our emotions
 - B. Healthy ways to process emotions and feelings
- II. Experiencing God
 - A. Meditation on Zephaniah 3:17–20
 - B. Learn to process emotions
- III. Sharing God's Love—Share what you have been learning about freedom from negative emotions

Lesson V: Living in Freedom

- I. Learning God's Truth
 - A. Jesus' mission to the church
 - B. Ways God acts to free his people
 - C. Freedom through spiritual disciplines
- II. Experiencing God—Create something that symbolizes your freedom or the freedom you desire
- III. Sharing God's Love—Do an act of kindness for a friend or family member

Lesson VI: Discovering Your Call

I. Learning God's Truth

- A. God created you with unique gifts
- B. Discover your gifts and calling

II. Experiencing God—Take time to write and reflect upon your gifts and calling

III. Sharing God's Love—Based on what you learned about your gifts and calling, write three goals that will help you in using your gifts. Love others with your gifts.

The author followed a basic outline for the home study and group study. The outline for the home study and the group study were as follows:

Outline of Home Study

Each woman was given one week to do each lesson at home before coming to the weekly group meeting.

- A. Begin study with prayer. Prayer is key in one's healing and restoration; therefore, each woman should allow time for prayer before they begin each study.

B. Learning God's Truth

- 1. Read Scripture text that is dispersed throughout the study.
- 2. Answer questions for each section.
- 3. Pause where the rose appears and journal thoughts and feelings. The information processed can be heavy; therefore, it is important not to rush through the study. The rose represents a place where one can freely break for the day to reflect, process, and journal in the space provided.

C. Experiencing God

- 1. Practice contemplative exercises or personal growth exercises.
- 2. Reflect and journal what God may be saying through the exercise. All participants in the study were encouraged to practice the exercises since, oftentimes, the greatest growth (spiritual and emotional) comes through practicing the spiritual disciplines.

D. Sharing God's Love

- 1. Apply what is learned by reaching out in love to others. The application is another way to foster healing.
- 2. Reflect on the ministry opportunity and discern God's presence in it.

Outline for Group Session for Lesson I

The weekly outline differed slightly depending on the lesson and the group development. The group members took a while to open up with one another, as is normal for any group dynamic.

- A. Opened with prayer.
- B. Introduction and ice-breaker questions to encourage bonding and cohesion.
- C. Women were asked to share their expectations of the study and what they would like to receive from the study.
- D. Time for sharing, discussion, and questions.
- E. Fifteen minutes of prayer to close.

At the end of the six weeks, the women were given a second questionnaire (see Appendix A-2) to see how the Bible study, exercises, and experience impacted them. All of their responses are recorded in chapter 5.

Project Design Summary

The project was performed in three phases. Phase I was the initial *Accepted in the Beloved* Bible study given to a small group of women at Pilgrim Church. Phase II was a short-term missions trip to Uganda and Rwanda, where five women's conferences were held based on the same theme: "Setting the Captives Free." In phase III, the revised and formatted *Accepted in the Beloved* Bible study (Appendix D) was given again to a small group of women in South Hamilton, Massachusetts.

Chapter 5

Outcomes

Outcome of Phase I: *Accepted in the Beloved Bible Study*

This phase of the project was facilitated at Pilgrim Church in Beverly, Massachusetts, in 2002. Outcomes of the first phase were evaluated in six categories: 1) group setting, 2) experience, 3) Bible study/care group (format, content, exercises and length), 4) leadership, 5) spiritual and emotional growth, and 6) future goals and changes. The last group meeting with the women was spent sharing and processing how the small group Bible study impacted them. The following information came from that meeting.

1. Group Setting

The women loved gathering together in a small group to share their experiences, strengths, and hopes. They found it helpful to be able to share their hearts with others who struggle with similar issues. They enjoyed the fellowship, the intimacy that developed within the group, the deep discussions that surfaced, the understanding and validation received from other members and the leader, and the prayer time. One woman shared that, since most of the group had previously worked together as a small group, they were able to bond more quickly—the openness, vulnerability, and honesty existed almost from the start.

The physical location of the meeting was unsatisfactory. People from the church kept walking in and out of the room, which was disruptive and distracting for the group. A group dealing with such intimate issues should meet in a quiet, more private space.

2. Experience

The experience was different for each woman. One woman shared that it was a painful process for her to go through the weekly topics because they triggered unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings and emotions. She realized that there were still many unresolved issues in her life. Although she felt defensive in her reactions to some of the topics discussed, the overall experience was positive. The other women said that they loved the experience of meeting consistently each week to discuss pertinent topics that affect their daily lives and the way they feel about themselves. A few of the women found it difficult to keep up with the weekly assignments due to other family obligations and life circumstances. Two of the women said that the study helped them to view their lives and their relationship to God more positively.

3. Bible Study/Care Group—Format, Content, Exercises, and Length

The women enjoyed the weekly assignments, but many found them too labor-intensive. They found the introduction to the topics helpful in that it set the stage for what they would be learning. Two of the women found the eight-week period too short. They felt that just as they were getting to know one another, as their defenses were breaking down to create a deeper intimacy within the group, then the group was over. The women loved the Scripture content of the study; they said they found it helpful to stay in specific passages of the Bible rather than jump around to different texts to prove a point.

4. Leadership

Leadership style is important in facilitating a small group Bible study/care group, because the one who is leading needs to provide a safe, intimate, welcoming environment that is conducive to spiritual and emotional growth. The women said that they felt

comfortable with the leader because they felt genuine acceptance, love, and understanding. One woman said that because the leader did not come across as a know-it-all, this helped her feel accepted and it enabled her to learn, to share her inmost heart, and to want to be an integral part of the group experience. She said that she could easily have felt intimidated and inferior being a new Christian, but instead she felt encouraged and accepted.

5. Spiritual and Emotional Growth

Spiritual or emotional growth is not easily measured, but evidence of growth can be seen by the fruit borne in one's life. When people enter into an eight-week study, generally they do not expect radical change to take place in the lives of the participants. However, the women said that they were more aware of issues and patterns in their lives that they want to change. Many of the women said they want to read and study more about the issues discussed over the eight weeks, and that they will begin applying the newly learned biblical truths to their daily lives. One woman said that learning the truth about God's acceptance in just a short period of time helped her to begin to accept herself and to see herself the way God sees her. This has given her the encouragement to continue to fight her battle with an eating disorder.

6. Future Goals and Changes

The women all agreed that they wanted to do another study together in the near future. Some suggested a retreat as part of our next group, and that the group itself meet in a more comfortable and private setting such as someone's home. Another woman thought it might be a good idea to affirm one another at the end of the study—to go around the room and share what each woman meant to the group. They were asked if the

author of the study should change the format, the time spent together, or anything else about the study, and they all agreed that they enjoyed everything the way it was.

Outcome of Phase II: Short-term Mission Trip

The author of this thesis confirmed her finding—that women abuse is a global problem—when she traveled throughout Uganda and Rwanda in 2004. She discovered that women abuse is not only an everyday occurrence in these countries, but the nature of women abuse is far worse there than in many developed countries. Two testimonies by a man and woman of East Africa included in this section affirm the stark reality of the treatment of women in these developing nations.

The outcome of phase II was evaluated in four categories: teaching/preaching, prayer, practical needs, and future goals and changes.

Many women and men gained much from the teaching and preaching by the team. The women felt affirmed, loved, appreciated, accepted, and grateful to God for the team's teachings, prayers, expertise, and for coming from the other side of the globe (USA) to minister to them. The team's presence alone spoke volumes of love to them. Oftentimes, the team was made aware of the acceptance and understanding of the message when the Africans broke out into rhythmic drum beating, made loud, jubilant praise music, and performed their tribal dance.

1. Teaching/Preaching

Many women during the five conferences recommitted their lives to Christ and shared that they were refreshed and encouraged to learn that they hold a more virtuous position in Christ than they had known.

One woman from the church in West Ankole Parish in Kati Town, Uganda, shared that she was saved through the teaching. She expressed that she used to think that quarreling with her husband gave her power, but went home realizing that this was not the case. She decided to be her husband's friend. She said that she was challenged to work for God—to help newly married couples and young girls, and to preach the gospel to her friends and family.

Many men stood up during the conference worship service as a sign of giving up their power to their wives. Many wives stood to receive it; they believed the message of biblical equality that was preached to them. A male politician from Bushenyi, a Ugandan village of Anglican worshippers, repented of beating his wife and of his drunkenness, and committed his life to Jesus. His wife cried tears of joy as she listened to her husband's testimony and his promise to treat her with love and respect. Hear his testimony in his own words:

I thank God for the women's enrichment training. Through the training, I have received the grace which has enabled me to know that I have been hurting my wife by beating her, abusing her, by coming back at night drunk, and not responding to my wife's advice. Through the training, I realized that I need to confess my faults to my wife, children, the church, and the community at large. I have learned to pray for others that they also could receive the same healing as I have experienced. Today I have decided to love my wife and to do God's work. The women's teaching has enlightened me, and God has given me the grace to say to my wife and children, "I'm sorry; please forgive me." God has healed a wound in my marriage.¹

A woman from Kati Parish in Uganda repented of her plot to kill her husband, who ran off with another woman and nearly sliced off her arm with a *panga* (sharp knife). She wanted to be right with God. Listen to her own words:

I thank God for the women's enrichment training. Through the training, I have seen God and learned to forgive my husband. The training has been timely in

¹ World Shine Ministries, *Update on Missions Trip*, 2004.

saving my marriage. I was going to kill my husband because he left me with children and married a widow and gave away my land and left me alone to suffer. I could not enjoy marriage because of my husband's abusive language in front of the children. The training has helped me decide to love my husband and stop planning to kill him. I will fix my eyes on Jesus who is my Redeemer and Savior. I promise not to kill him.²

In Rwanda, at least thirty-one people, mostly children, received Christ, and the local parish of Nyagatare agreed to disciple these new students of the word.

The overall mission for phase 2 of the project was fruitful. God answered the team's prayers by allowing people in Uganda and Rwanda to experience an abundance of his love and acceptance, and by helping them begin to grow in the knowledge that men and women are equal in the eyes of God, so women deserve to be treated with honor, dignity, and respect. Moreover, what a privilege it was for the team to partner in the gospel to minister healing, reconciliation, and salvation to a people scarred by the ravages of war, genocide, and multiple abuses. God is an all-loving, mighty God.

2. Prayer

When the team prayed over the women at St. John's Church in Kampala, the women experienced joy and peace during the laying on of hands. Most of the women shared that they had never before had such an experience. They appreciated the team taking the time with them to pray over them and anoint them with oil for healing.

3. Meeting Practical Needs

The women of Nyagatare Parish in Rwanda shared a need with the team for a sweater machine, not only to make sweaters, but also to encourage independence, enhance their creativity and productivity, and give them the ability to earn money to

² Ibid.

support their families. After the team returned to the United States, two team members sent a gift of money to Nyagatare Parish, and, a month or so later, a used sweater machine was purchased for \$600. After a six-month period, the women received training, and production was up and running within months. The women are delighted with their newfound financial freedom. The word of this new business venture spread throughout Rwanda, and the story of the sweater machine ended up being broadcast on public radio. When some of the team members went back the following year, Beatrice, one of the women from Nyagatare Parish, came to meet them and shared this powerful story with Patti Ricotta, a member of the team, who then relayed it to the author of the thesis. She shared that the broadcast mentioned how there was a group of amazing Christian women who had taken on a difficult challenge of learning this new skill and were helping each other create a brighter financial future for themselves. The reporter talked about how the women helped each other without competing against each other, and how their love and concern for one another was a large part of the success of the project. Beatrice was making dinner for her family one night when the story came on the radio. She had no idea the interview had been done, and she said she just sat in her kitchen and cried at how good the Lord had been. God is good, all the time, as the Africans love to proclaim.

4. Future Goals of Ministry to Internationals

Empower International Ministries is a new nonprofit ministry that is in its infancy stage.³ This ministry resulted from the work that has continued in East Africa since the first short-term mission trip in January 2004. There have been two additional short-term

³ See complete Purpose Statement in Appendix E for Empower International Ministries drafted by Carrie Miles, author of *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

missions trips since then. The hope and dream for this ministry is to not only continue in Africa, but also to move beyond the continent into many other nations.

The purpose of Empower International Ministries is to:

work alongside existing ministries in historically non-Christian and developing countries to promote biblical teachings on the equal worth and potential for unity among all human beings, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social, or family status. We seek to emulate the early Christian church in raising the respect, freedoms, and rights accorded women; in freeing men from norms of worldly masculinity that lead to violence and despair; in encouraging equal-regard marriage and family happiness; and in helping to create and develop community values that eliminate sexual, ethnic, and other social antagonisms.⁴

We preach the Good News that salvation in Christ frees men and women from the materialism and cultural norms limiting their spiritual, emotional and physical well-being.⁵

Empower International Ministries, when it receives the nonprofit status and funding it needs, will be operational within a year or two. God alone knows what the future holds for this ministry, which was birthed out of the ideas, dreams, prayers, and vision of a few courageous, God-honoring Christian women.

Outcome of Phase III: The Revised *Accepted in the Beloved Bible Study*

Based on the feedback from the first study, the author condensed each lesson, making the study more manageable for busy women; incorporated more contemplative exercises into the study to help women grow in experiencing God; and included an application section to help women reach out beyond themselves. Although some women said the eight-week time period was too short, the author actually shortened the time

⁴ Written by Carrie Miles of Washington, D.C. (Empower International Ministries Purpose Statement Called Dignity, Unity and Holy Purpose, July 2006. Online at www.empowerinternational.org.)

⁵ Ibid.

frame to six weeks because the women in the second study (phase 3) asked for a short time frame due to busy work and school schedules.

The second time the *Accepted in the Beloved* Bible study was used, the author gave the women a questionnaire to fill out at the beginning of the study and then again when the study was completed (Appendix A-2). The first questionnaire was to understand better the women participating in the study, to determine their understanding of God, to identify any existing blocks to knowing and experiencing God's love and acceptance, and to discover their greatest desire in their relationships to God. Additionally, the women were asked if they had ever been able to share their pain and struggles with their pastors. The second questionnaire was used to determine if any emotional or spiritual growth had taken place, to ask if the women had grown in God's love and acceptance, to help determine the effectiveness of the study, and to ask for any suggestions or ideas to improve the study. A sampling of responses to the questionnaires before and after the Bible study follows:

Before the Bible Study

Since you became a Christian, have you ever struggled with experiencing God's love?

Yes, it has been a struggle because I have projected my earthly father onto God. My father was an alcoholic.

On some level, it has always been a struggle. But every year, I have experienced God's love more deeply. I grew up in a family feeling unwanted, that my existence was a nuisance. I was tolerated, never delighted in, except possibly their pride in my academic accomplishments. Though I firmly believe now that God loved me before I was born into my family, I still occasionally have some blocks in my mind and heart to embracing and living in the reality of unconditional love.

Yes. Ever since I became a Christian, I could never understand the relationship people say they have with Jesus. I do not sense God's presence, and have just recently started experiencing his answers to prayer. I believe God loves me in my head, but I still want to understand his love in my heart.

Do you honestly believe that God loves you?

Yes. In my heart, I am growing toward resting in that knowledge. This study is a blessing in this regard. This has been a strong theme in my life lately.

I do believe this. I simply need to learn to live under that assumption, because I have formed habits based on the assumption that God does not accept me.

It is interesting to note that one woman in the study, who suffered more from spousal abuse, had no major problems with understanding and experiencing God's love and acceptance. The formative years are critical for children in receiving an accurate image of God.

What is your concept of God?

It differs from hour to hour. At this moment, loving, reaching out, speaking to me, big out there. I would love to see him as the Psalm 18 image—rushing down to me to lift me up.

I am not sure, since I have seen God as similar to my earthly father. It has taken a long time for me to trust in God's love.

What is your greatest desire in your relationship to God?

To feel joy in His love for me and lots of love to give back.

Intimacy.

With God, my greatest desire is to be with him all the time, and walk through life with him, and to live out the wonderful plan for which he created me, in his constant presence.

To obey him.

Have you ever shared any of this information with your pastor? Were they supportive and helpful?

Yes, I shared. I'm not sure if they were helpful.

Not with my pastors, they don't deal primarily with the emotional needs of the individuals in the congregation. I have shared these things with a counselor and with my spiritual director.

No.

After the Bible Study

Did this Bible study help you in any way to know or experience a greater measure of God's love and acceptance?

I think this Bible study was a part of my realizing God's love and acceptance.

This study helped to ground much of the work God had been doing in my heart through counseling in Scriptures, which provided such a rich reservoir of truth which I can draw upon. I feel as if God's love was grounded, not only in reading, but also in the sharing. Because I was able to share without fear about the struggles of my journey, I was able to experience the healing of God's community.

I don't know, because I was distracted during the period of this Bible study and I did not give parts of it the attention it deserved! However, there is no question that I was deeply *blessed* by God through our meetings and discussions together—many words of wisdom were spoken. So, yes, I think that I did see God's love and acceptance in greater measure. I also enjoyed a chance to share from my own experience.

What were some biblical truths that you learned that you found healing or helpful?

Ephesians 2:10—created in Christ Jesus for good works. This shows me that everything about my journey is part of a purposeful work, and that God intends to glorify himself through me, that I am a good creation.

All of the Scripture was well-chosen. I want to go back and meditate on many of the passages.

Each section had Scripture that really reinforced the objective of the lesson. Ephesians 3:14–21; 1 John 4:7–8, etc.—all of these were Scriptures I need to meditate on because they are the truth I need to sink deep in my heart.

Did this study help you to understand your identity in Christ better?

I think I was struck by how powerfully I connected with the idea of Christian community and the importance of it, that it is a way that God has designed me to bring about something honoring to God in my generation.

I think it shed a bright light on my identity in Christ as I already know it in my heart. It reminded me of and solidified the truth that has been spoken to me over many years. God has done much healing in my life and this encouraged me to remember what God has done and to go deeper.

Did your image of God change? (if you held a distorted image)

Yes, I think it was clarified further.

I realized how much I still think that God may think my emotions are stupid, but I feel more trust that God can redeem everything.

Yes, God is not my earthly father or mother. Conceptions of love I have had and deep-rooted hurts seem to have unconsciously made up my image of God. These images are hard to erase. But I am in the process of reversing the lies into truths about who God is.

Did anything change for you during the six weeks?

Yes, I did come to a better understanding and was better able to articulate my call in Christ. The Lord began a deep work of inner healing in my life in 1987. So much has been done, and my current focus has been more outward. But the lessons did contribute to this outward focus and brought some pieces together.

I feel like one of the most persistent blocks in my growth, personally, in ministry, and in relationships is a fundamental distrust of other people and in relationships. But this group really helped me to be open to authentic Christian community. . . . I really want to be a part of developing life-giving, God-honoring community, and I have begun to make very big choices in my life for my marriage and my relationships to move in the direction of seeking and working toward greater community.

My healing has all been such a long journey, all these things are improving. It feels like a puzzle, and most of the pieces are in place, but still I know something is missing. I struggle to feel God's presence, or is that just another way to say "His love?" Ephesians 3:14–21 is a key verse to what my struggle is—knowing God's love, or knowing the depth of his love, understanding who God is, having a more personal intimate relationship, are not yet fully in my heart. I hope God will show me these things, but for now it is still a journey.

What suggestions or ideas do you have to make this study better?

Some of the questions are incredibly broad and would require pages of journaling to answer. But these can be a starting point for some intensive journaling. . . . Everyone can benefit from it—but it really addresses those who have become aware that there is something wrong and who want to be healed. Having said that,

the truths in the study are vital for all Christians and should be studied. We need to be reminded and go deeper.

It felt rather short. I wonder how it would be to meet less often over a longer period. But I really appreciated it how it was—I was just curious what effect that would have on the group dynamic.

I thought the study was great! I liked the size, the time spent, subjects and Scriptures.

I really enjoyed the study. Your leadership made it a very safe place to share and be honest.

This song makes me think of the group:

Kingdom Comes—

When anger fills your heart,
When in your pain and hurt
You find the strength to stop,
You bless instead of curse.

When doubting floods your soul,
Though all things feel unjust,
You open up your heart;
You find a way to trust.

That's a little stone, that's a little mortar,
That's a little seed, that's a little water.
In the hearts of the sons and the daughters,
The kingdom's coming.⁶

Summary

Conducting the Bible study twice over a three-year period helped the author gain a better understanding of what biblical truths, spiritual disciplines, and key exercises most encouraged healing and recovery in abused Christian women. Additionally, it caused the author to understand the power and importance of small groups in offering abused women a safe haven for expressing their authentic selves and being able to share the

⁶ Sara Groves, *Kingdom Comes*, quoted by an anonymous study participant.

depths of their pain and abuse within the context of a loving, encouraging, edifying Christian community. Because all the women felt greatly affirmed within the context of a loving Christian community, this met the author's primary goal of offering good pastoral care to abused Christian women by encouraging them to grow in understanding and experiencing God's unconditional love and acceptance.

Recommendations for Further Studies

In asking the women what other topics that they would like to see covered, they suggested a "Part Two" study that starts with "Discovering Your Call" and continues through how that is worked out in accordance with God's will for each individual. They also suggested a study on spiritual journaling and another on the importance of relationships, how they have been marred by the pain, and what role healthy relationships play in growth and discipleship. Additionally, the women would like to study the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, silence, and solitude to continue their emotional and spiritual growth in Christ.

Accepted in the Beloved is a study that is greatly needed, because research indicates that more than 25 percent of all women are abused in their lifetimes. This study was designed and developed with the purpose of providing good pastoral care to female survivors of abuse.

APPENDIX A-1

Initial Questionnaire for Women

My name is Leslie McKinney. I am Pastor of Prayer and Community at Pilgrim Church in Beverly, Massachusetts, and a Doctor of Ministry student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton. Since I became a Christian in 1985, I have desired to experience God's love and acceptance and to love and accept others. And I want to teach women to do the same; therefore, I am interested in you and your experiences with God.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could take time to reflect upon and answer the following questions. Please be as *honest* as you possibly can. Please use a separate piece of paper if needed.

1. How long have you been a Christian?
2. Since you became a Christian, have you ever struggled with experiencing God's love? God's acceptance of you? *Acceptance means for God to look upon you with delight, favor, or pleasure, or to welcome you to himself with open arms.* If so, tell me about this. Be as specific as possible and honest, and take as much space as needed.
3. Do you *honestly* believe that God loves you? That God accepts you as you are? Explain.
4. Have you had experiences in your life that caused you to feel rejected or abandoned by God? Tell me about this.
5. If you once struggled with God's love and acceptance, how did your thinking and beliefs change? Did someone model God's love or acceptance to you? Or was it a friend who expressed God's love to you? Whatever it was, please share as much as you can about this. What was the main thing that caused you to change your beliefs or thinking?
6. What is your concept (image) of God? (Not necessarily what the Bible says, but how do you honestly understand and/or imagine God to be?)
7. Do you struggle or have you ever struggled with intimacy in relationships with friends or spouse? Do you struggle with intimacy with God? *Intimacy is a close, open, and transparent relationship where you share your honest feelings and emotions.*
8. If you answered yes to question 7, why do you think you struggle with intimacy? Do you think your parenting had anything to do with it or anything else? Share your thoughts on this.
9. How did your parents reflect God to you?
10. Is there any experience (or experiences) in your life that you believe is an obstacle to

your being able to receive God's love and acceptance?

11. Do you ever struggle with negative feelings or emotions as a result of your past or present experiences? Tell me about this, and, if you can, name the feelings or emotions.
12. In your opinion, what is the single greatest obstacle in your life to being able to experience God's love and acceptance?
13. Do you experience God's abundant life? If yes, in what ways? If no, explain why you believe this to be so.
14. Do you want to experience God's abundant life? What would this look like or feel like to you?
15. What is your greatest desire in your relationship to God? In your relationship to your significant others?

APPENDIX A-2

Follow-Up Questionnaire

The study *Accepted in the Beloved* consists of six lessons—to refresh your memory, the lessons were: 1) Chosen in Love, 2) My Image, a Reflection of His Image, 3) The True Nature of God, 4) Embracing Your God-given Emotions, 5) Living in Freedom, and 6) Discovering Your Call. Each study was divided into three sections: Learning God’s Truth, Experiencing God, and Sharing God’s Love.

1. Did this Bible study help you in any way to know or experience a greater measure of God’s love and acceptance? Share your thoughts.
2. What were some of the biblical truths that you learned that you found healing or helpful?
3. Did this study help you to understand your identity in Christ better? Share your thoughts.
4. Did your image of God change (if you held a distorted image)?
5. Did anything change for you during the six weeks? For example, did your understanding of God change? Did your self-image improve? Did you learn to process your emotions in a more healthy way? Are you able to get in touch with your feelings—to feel them and embrace them? Did you come to understand better your call in Christ? Please share anything that comes to you regarding changes or inner healing. (Use space on back if necessary).
6. Which lesson of the study did you enjoy the most? Why?
7. Which lesson of the study did you enjoy the least? Why?

8. Did you participate in the “Experiencing God” exercises? If so, did they help you to experience God or to grow closer to God? How did they go for you?
9. Did you participate in the “Sharing God’s Love” application? If so, how did this go for you?
10. Were there any topics that you would have liked to see covered?
11. What suggestions or ideas do you have to make this study better?

APPENDIX B

The Effects of Abuse

What are the effects of any form of childhood or adulthood abuse on women? Abuse has the following effects:

- Distorts a woman's self-image
- Distorts the image of God
- Hampers a woman's ability to trust and develop intimacy with God and others
- Inhibits a woman from expressing her God-given emotions
- Produces shame, a debilitating emotion
- Creates a feeling of powerlessness
- Causes a woman to isolate
- Can keep a woman from living the abundant Christian life and fulfilling her destiny

APPENDIX C

Accepted in the Beloved Bible Study Outline

Lesson I: Chosen in Love—A lesson to help God’s beloved daughters, especially those who have been broken and wounded through abuse, to know and experience God’s unconditional love and acceptance.

- I. Introduction: a story of brokenness, rejection, and abuse
- II. Learning God’s Truth
 - A. God identifies with rejection and abuse
 - B. God is love
 - C. Blocks to knowing and experiencing God’s love
 - D. God’s spiritual blessings
 - E. God’s daughters as overcomers
- III. Experiencing God
- IV. Sharing God’s Love

Lesson II: My Image, a Reflection of God—a study to teach God’s daughters what it means to be created in God’s image and to reflect the beauty and glory of God.

- I. Introduction: Self-image and the image of God
- II. Learning God’s Truth
 - A. Created in God’s image to reflect the attributes of God
 - B. Created in God’s image to work
 - C. Created in God’s image for relationship
- III. Experiencing God
 - A. Mirror exercise
 - B. Contemplative exercise: five minutes of silence and solitude
- IV. Sharing God’s Love: Pray each day for anyone who needs to know that he or she is fearfully and wonderfully made.

Lesson III: God’s True Nature—a lesson to help women understand what they really believe about God, and to identify any distorted images of God taught through abuse, so that they can understand God’s true nature.

- I. Introduction
- II. Learning God’s Truth
 - A. Distorted images of God
 - B. God’s nature
 - 1. God is faithful
 - a. God keeps his covenant to a thousand generations
 - b. God keeps his promises
 - c. God’s word is pure and true

- 2. God is compassionate
 - a. Binds up the brokenhearted
 - 3. God is love
 - 4. God is like a husband
- III. Experiencing God: centering prayer exercise
- IV. Sharing God's love: Share one of God's attributes with one in need.

Lesson IV: Embracing Your God-given Emotions—a lesson to help survivors understand and embrace their God-given emotions so they can learn to express and process them in healthy, life-renewing ways.

- I. Introduction: Learning to express unwanted emotions freely and positively
- II. Learning God's Truth
 - A. Our thoughts and beliefs affect our emotions
 - B. Healthy ways to processing emotions and feelings
 - 1. God cares about our feelings
 - 2. Four ways to free yourself from unwanted emotions
 - a. What am I feeling and why?
 - b. Watch, control, and alter emotions
 - c. Finding the root cause of negative emotions
 - d. Practice the spiritual disciplines
- III. Experiencing God: meditation on Zephaniah 3:17–20
- IV. Sharing God's Love: share what you have been learning about freedom from negative emotions.

Lesson V: Living in Freedom—a study to help women learn to what it means to be free in Christ and to live out the freedom that Christ purchased for them.

- I. Introduction
- II. Learning God's Truth
 - A. Jesus' mission to the church
 - 1. Set the captives free
 - a. Freedom from oppression
 - 1. What is oppression?
 - 2. What is freedom?
 - b. Freedom from sin
 - B. Ways God acts to free his people
 - 1. God understands your suffering
 - 2. God desires freedom to live in "a land flowing with milk and honey"
 - 3. God wants to meet your heart's desire
 - 4. God gives abundant life

- C. Freedom through spiritual disciplines
 - 1. Study the word
 - 2. Prayer and forgiveness
 - 3. Practice of silence and solitude
- III. Experiencing God: Create something that symbolizes your freedom or the freedom you desire.
- IV. Sharing God's Love: Do an act of kindness for a friend or family member.

Lesson VI: Discovering Your Call—a lesson to help women learn how God has uniquely gifted each of his children, in order to help the women discover their unique gifts so that they can live out their calling in Christ Jesus

- I. Introduction
- II. Learning God's Truth
 - A. God created you with unique gifts
 - 1. To fulfill his purposes in you
 - 2. To obey his commandments to love
 - B. Discover your gifts and calling
 - 1. What do you do well and what gives you pleasure?
 - 2. God uses your most painful experiences for his glory
 - 3. God empowers you through the Holy Spirit to use your gifts
- III. Experiencing God: Take time to write and reflect upon your gifts and calling.
- IV. Sharing God's Love: Based on what you learned about your gifts and calling, write three goals that will help you in using your gifts. Love others with your gifts.

APPENDIX D

Accepted in the Beloved



Bible Study

Contents

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About This Study

The Bible study *Accepted in the Beloved* is based on Ephesians 1:6, which says, “To the praise of his glorious grace in which he has made us accepted in the beloved” (WEB). *Accepted in the Beloved* is written for all of God’s daughters who have suffered abuse and who long to know and experience the intimate love and acceptance of God.

The study includes six topical lessons, one lesson for each of six weeks, written to encourage healing, growth, and transformation. Each of the six weekly lessons includes three different sections: *Learning God’s Truth*, *Experiencing God*, and *Sharing God’s Love*. *Learning God’s Truth* is designed to take you through a study of God’s word in order to enlighten your minds to God’s truth. The second section, *Experiencing God*, is designed to help you grow in experiencing God through contemplative exercises, to foster deeper heart knowledge of God’s truth and spiritual transformation. *Sharing God’s Love*, the third section, is designed to encourage you to reach out beyond yourself as you apply what you have learned. A faded rose, a symbol of God’s love, is placed throughout each lesson of the study to indicate a break in the study, and to provide a space to journal or reflect any thoughts or feelings that arise during the exercises or questions.

To receive the maximum benefit from the study, the author suggests the following guidelines.

Individual Participation

As with anything, the more you put into the study, the more you will gain. As you participate in the study, it is important to practice three important principles.

1) Pray without ceasing

Make prayer a critical part of this study and your healing journey. Ask God to guide you as you seek to learn and be transformed by God's truth. If possible, additionally engage others to pray for you during the six-week period, because prayer is powerful and can be an important key to unlocking the doors to your emotional and spiritual freedom. Pray for strength, healing, growth, transformation, a deeper revelation of God's love and acceptance, and for God to lead and guide you each day as you read and study God's word, as you experience God through practicing the contemplative exercises, and as you reach out to others in need.

2) Be diligent in study

The word of God is powerful and will bring life-renewing changes as you read, study, and apply it to your everyday life. Please take as much time as you need to study God's truth and answer the questions. Doing the necessary work will benefit you greatly in the end. Remember, healing takes time, so be gentle with yourself and stay faithful to the process.

3) Reflect through journaling and contemplation

Journaling opens the door to healing as it allows you to process unwanted emotions and feelings. Sometimes, as you commit to writing, the floodgates of your heart open up, unleashing pent-up feelings and emotions that you never knew existed. Let your thoughts flow unhindered and try not to worry about your grammar or punctuation. This exercise is not about perfection, but rather about healing and wholeness. Allow God to minister to you as you journal and practice the contemplative exercises. Spending time in

quiet and solitude will allow God to minister to you deeply and eventually free you to be the woman God created you to be as you fulfill God's purposes for your life.

Group Participation

After you complete your weekly lesson, you will meet once a week for group discussion, questions, and prayer. Small group participation can help solidify God's truth in your heart and mind, allow you the space to be yourself, and provide the opportunity to experience authentic Christian community. If possible, practice three key principles as you gather together in your small group.

1) Be true to yourself

Honesty and openness create intimacy with God and others. When you have suffered abuse, trust takes time to develop. If the group is safe and loving, this will enable you to be yourself as you begin to share from your heart. Stay true to your thoughts and feelings as you express them within the group. This is one place where you do not have to be perfect in order to be loved and accepted—just be yourself. And you may be pleasantly surprised when God uses this group experience to help you understand yourself better through the lives of others.

2) Give others space to share their stories

Sharing your story, as you answer questions and participate within the group, is important. In fact, it is so important that God created space within this group for you to be able to share openly and freely. It is also important for others to be able to share their stories with you. Try to be considerate of others' needs to share—your intentional love,

care, time, and active listening will encourage healing in others. One of the most powerful means of healing is through community.

3) Patiently wait on God for your healing

Healing is a process and takes time. Learn to be gentle, patient, and loving with yourself as you participate in this Bible study and small group. God is capable of miraculously healing anyone, but often, God chooses to heal over time. When you wait on God for your healing, amazing things can happen. You can get to know yourself better, and you can become more acquainted with God and his gracious and loving ways. These are two good reasons to continue to wait on God's timing for your healing.

May you enjoy the study as you work through painful life experiences. May you grow in the knowledge of God's amazing love and acceptance. You are so worth the time and effort, because you are uniquely created in the image of God!

Lesson One: Chosen in Love

As we begin our study together, allow me to share a personal childhood story with you. When I was a small child, I owned a doll named Betty. Betty was special to me; she was my favorite doll. Betty was beautiful, with long, dark, thick hair and wide brown eyes. I loved to spend time playing with Betty. In fact, I played with her so often that poor Betty started wearing out. Betty lost an arm, and then eventually, one of her legs was missing, and at one point, I cut Betty's hair all off. Poor Betty! To many, she was a terrible sight, but not to me. I loved her no matter what she looked like.

Unfortunately, my mother did not share the same sentiments. One morning when I awoke, I could not find Betty. I looked in my bed, under the covers, on the floor, and under the bed. I looked everywhere I could think of, but Betty was missing. I asked my mother where Betty was, and she said, "Betty is outside in the garage in the trash can where she belongs. I threw her away. She was all ragged and worn. You don't want that old doll Betty anymore, do you?"

"You threw her away?" I cried. "That's my doll!" Then the thought occurred to me that I could still rescue her before she ended up at the dump. Hastily, I slipped outside, pajamas and all, and rummaged through the trash cans until I spotted her

head sticking out of one of the cans. "There you are, Betty," I said. And I rescued her out of the trash can, brushed the dirt off, and held her close to me. I felt relieved and pleased with Betty back in my arms.

As I pondered this childhood experience years later, I realized that when my mother threw Betty away, I felt as if she were throwing me away. As a small child, having grown up in a conflicted home environment, I identified with Betty's brokenness and wounds, and more than anything, I longed for unconditional love and acceptance.

In my Doctor of Ministry class in 2002, as we discussed body image, women's self-esteem, and the impact that playing with the Barbie doll had on children's development, I was reminded of Betty. Suddenly, I realized that Betty had far more meaning and significance in my life than I had ever imagined. The story of Betty was a divine call from God to help his beloved daughters, especially those who have been broken and wounded through the horrors and pain of abuse, to know and experience God's unconditional love and acceptance.

I pray that you will come to experience God's amazing unconditional love and acceptance like never before. Isn't this what the Gospel message is all about?



As you consider this story, can you identify with it in any way? Write your thoughts on the lines below.

Perhaps you have felt rejected, broken, or like a throwaway.

Do you really believe that God loves and accepts you?

Do you believe that you have to be perfect and whole in order to be loved and acceptable to God?

Have you ever struggled with believing that God really loves you?

If you have, you are not alone. Many people struggle with believing this profound truth for various reasons. Maybe, as a child, your parents were unable to nurture and accept you the way you needed them to, and this has hindered you from experiencing the reality of God's unconditional love. Perhaps you have experienced repeated rejection or abuse from your spouse, a close friend, or a significant other, and this has hin-

dered you from believing that you are precious, valuable, and fully acceptable to God. Maybe you struggle daily with some temptation or addictive behavior, and you do not believe that God could possibly love and accept you. Instead, you imagine God's rejection of you, and you believe in order for God to accept you, you have to be perfect!

Whatever your experience, do you long to know and experience the intimate love and acceptance of God? Would it not be wonderfully freeing to wake up every morning, knowing beyond a doubt just how much God loves and accepts you? This would be life-transforming, would it not? This is a hard kernel of truth to understand and internalize. However, let us look at God's word together and discover the amazing truth about God's love and acceptance.

My prayer for you is that, over the next six weeks, as we embark on this exciting journey of learning and growing in God's word, that you will experience the intimate love and acceptance of God—maybe the love and acceptance that you have longed for your whole life long. May this truth transform your life and cause you to grow in a more intimate relationship with God.

Before you begin this week's Bible study, take a moment and ask God to guide you as you study his word and to bring revelation to your mind and heart about his life-transforming truths.

Learning God's Truth

In lesson 1, we will study Scripture passages 1 John 4:7-8; 1:4-9; John 3:16; Ephesians 1:1-10; Romans 8:35-39, and Revelation 7:14.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ^sWhoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)'

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)

God is _____.

What does this mean to you? _____

How did God show his love for you? _____

What an amazing gift of sacrificial love! God loves you deeply; there is no greater expression of love than for one to lay down his life for you. Jesus died for you; if you were the only person on the face of the earth, Jesus would have died for you.

Why did Jesus have to die? _____

By faith, when you confess your sins, you are saved.

Because God's very nature is Love, what is God's command to us? _____

This sounds easy, but it is not always so easy to love others. Now, you might be thinking, "Well, I try to love, but it is not easy. I have been so mistreated by those who were supposed to love and nurture me, that I have a very difficult time loving others."

This is quite human and understandable. It is very difficult to love others when you have not received love from your significant others. You cannot give out of an empty vessel. This is precisely why you need to soak in the unconditional love of God before you can attempt to love others. It is all right to give yourself permission to take time to grow in the love of God before you attempt to love unconditionally others, especially those who have harmed and hurt you deeply. Be gentle with yourself. Furthermore, love comes from God and we can only love with agape love, a selfless, sacrificial love, when we allow Christ's love to flow through us to others.

What circumstances in your life have hindered you from knowing and experiencing God's love?

Either journal your thoughts and feelings or share your heart with others in the group.



How have these negative life experiences affected the way you image God? Take a few moments and write down how you have imaged God because of the experiences of others.

Who is God to you? _____

Coming to know and experience a loving God is a process. It takes time to grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God, it takes time to heal the memories and it takes time to trust a God whom you cannot see.

Now, let us turn to the book of Ephesians.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Ephesians 1:1-10)

The apostle Paul originally wrote this letter to the faithful saints of Ephesus while he was in prison. His purpose in writing to the church at Ephesus was to encourage the community in the faith among both Jews and Gentiles, and to help the body of Christ to live in peace and love with one another. But in order for the church to live in true peace and love, they must first know their identity in Christ. Each person must know who he or she is in relation to Jesus Christ and understand this new life in Christ.

The apostle Paul tells us that, as God's beloved children, we have been blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

To whom do we belong? _____ Yes, we belong to Christ.

What are the spiritual blessings that God has blessed us with in Christ?

Name three of these spiritual blessings that you learned about in Ephesians 1:1-10:

- 1) _____ (v. 4)
- 2) _____ (v. 5)
- 3) _____ (v. 10)

We have received the past blessing of being “chosen” in Christ before the foundations of the world. You became a part of God’s family when you came to believe in Jesus Christ, a global family both here on the earth and in heaven. You do not stand alone. You were chosen by your loving God, called out for his divine purposes and for his good pleasure. What a privilege! What a calling! You are his children through Jesus Christ, accepted in the Beloved. As children, you are still growing and learning; still in process. Although you have not arrived yet, you are still working together as a community on the way to perfection in Christ. Just reflect on this truth: You were chosen in Christ before you were even born. God knew that you would exist one day and be his beloved child. You have always been precious to him even before you existed.

What does it mean that you were chosen before the foundations of the world?

And what were you chosen for? Read verse 4. _____

Imagine God chose you in love, to be holy and blameless before him—an awesome privilege, but a grave responsibility.

The second spiritual blessing is that God adopted you as his daughter through Jesus Christ, according to God’s good pleasure. God took great joy in planning beforehand to adopt you into his family and grant you freedom from your sins through the blood of Christ.

What does it mean that you were adopted by God? Why did you need to be adopted?

The fact that you came to faith in Christ is an act of God’s divine grace. Grace is God’s unmerited favor that he bestowed on you in the Beloved. You have been accepted in the Beloved just as you are; you did not have to earn this love or acceptance. God welcomed you with open arms into his family. You are no longer alone. You no longer have to suffer alone; you have been made holy and blameless in Christ Jesus, and you are adopted into the glorious family of your Beloved. What a great blessing! Thank God for his blessing to you.

And the third blessing is the future promise of being united with all of God’s children throughout the ages.² For, one day, when the fullness of time has arrived, God will gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. God’s people will gather, from every tribe, language, nation, and people, before God’s throne to love and worship our Beloved for all eternity. What a privilege to be a part of the family of God! When the fullness of the age arrives, all our hardships in this earthly life will seem momentary in comparison to meeting our glorious Lord arrayed in full splendor and being in his presence for all eternity.



Let's take a look at another passage that will also help us to understand God's amazing love. Please read Romans 8:35-39 and see that, no matter what we go through in this earthly life, that we are never separated from Christ's love.

³⁵ *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 35-39)*

Because of the nature of your past circumstances, there may have been times in your life when you have experienced feelings of abandonment; perhaps even from those who were supposed to love and support you the most. We live in a fallen world, and, unfortunately, evil happens. People hurt us, abandon us, abuse us, misunderstand us, and ignore our deepest needs. Those we should have been able to depend on have let us down. However, the word tells us that God has always been there and promises never to leave us. The word "separate" in this context means to "go away" or "depart."³

What are the seven forms of suffering Paul mentions in this passage? (v. 35) _____

Paul says none of these problems in life will ever separate us from the love of Christ.

Share what this means to you. _____

The Roman citizens were serving God with all their strength, sacrificing themselves for Christ's sake. They experienced everything Paul mentions and, as a minister of Christ, Paul did as well. (Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-32 to see some of what Paul went through as he served the Lord.)

And not only do the problems of life not separate us from Christ's love, but Paul also tells us that *nothing* shall ever separate us from Christ's love.

What else does Paul mention that he is convinced shall never separate us, God's children, from God's love? (vv. 35-39). _____

Paul says that not even death shall separate us from God's love. How awesome is God's love for us! If we know Jesus, we never have to fear God leaving us or abandoning us. We can then put our complete trust and confidence in God, for, although others may have let us down, God never will. What about sin? Does sin separate us from God? Even sin never separates us from God's love, yet it will indeed effect our fellowship. But if we confess our sins daily, we will remain in love.

⁴ *We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.* ⁵ *This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.* ⁶ *If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true;* ⁷ *but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.* ⁸ *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:4-9)*

Read also Revelation 17:14 and Romans 8:37.

They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful. (Revelation 17:14)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

What is a conqueror?

The word meaning, “conquer” in Greek has a prefix attached to it (*hypernikao*). The prefix means “above” or “surpassing,” which means that we will not only conquer, but we will be super victorious as we live out our faith in Christ.⁴

How will you conquer? As you continue to walk by faith, one day at a time, with God’s strength, you will not only overcome all the evil that was perpetrated against you, through Christ, you will overcome the world!

You are loved with an everlasting love, and you have significant meaning and purpose for life!

Message of Love—Before we move on to the Experiencing God section, I want to reiterate a truth you just studied. You are deeply loved! In fact, you are so loved that God gave up his only Son so that everyone who believes may not perish but have everlasting life! That’s right, Jesus died for you!

And if you confess with your lips Jesus is Lord
and believe in you heart that God raised him
from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans:10:9

The Gospel is a message of amazing love! If you so desire, take a few moments in prayer asking God to forgive you for your sins, and to come into your heart so you can have assurance of eternal life.

Experiencing God

It is one thing to know in your head that God loves you. It is yet another thing to know deep within your heart. As the old saying goes, the longest road is the road from your head to your heart. This is why it is important to practice the spiritual disciplines in order to experience the deep love of God. In my own life, the greatest tool that God has used to grow me in his love is simply being with him in silence and solitude.

Sit in a comfortable, relaxed position. Breathe in deeply and then breathe out, three or four times. Spend a few minutes in prayer thanking God for his amazing love for you and for enabling you to know and experience his love more intimately. Pray that God would set your mind free from any distorted image of God, and that you will continue to grow in the knowledge that Go—who is love—is approachable, intimate, compassionate, and comforting, and desires to be with you now and every day for the rest of your life.

Then, as you rest in God, meditate on Ephesians 3:14–21.

(Meditate means to read very slowly and prayerfully, chewing on each word allowing room for the Holy Spirit to speak.) Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read the passage. Pay attention to any word or phrase that may strike you. What is God saying to you through his word? Read this passage a second time, and this time ask God what he wants you to learn from his word. Reflect on what you learned and, if possible, keep a journal of your thoughts and reflections.

In my own prayer life, I continue to pray this prayer daily for my life and the life of the church. I have found that praying the word of God is powerful and effective, and of course, God’s word never returns void (Isaiah 55:11).

Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,* ¹⁵ *from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name.* ¹⁶ *I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit,* ¹⁷ *and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love.* ¹⁸ *I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth,* ¹⁹ *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* ²⁰ *Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Sharing God's Love

Reach out in love today to one person who needs to experience more of God's love. Do something for him or her that will show the love of Christ. Spend time listening to that person, write an encouraging note or email, or be open to however God may lead you.



You're finished for the week. Great job! Next week you'll study "My Image, a Reflection of God." You'll learn some amazing truths about who you are as a precious child of God!

Lesson Two: My Image, a Reflection of God

In our first week, we learned that God unconditionally loves and accepts us; the spiritual magnitude of this truth is mind-boggling. The God of the whole universe deems us valuable and worthy to receive his gift of love. Now, although we know this in our heads, it is incredibly difficult to believe this deep down in our hearts. We just cannot believe that we are valuable and worthy of God's love; therefore, many survivors of abuse suffer from a *poor self-image*.

What is self-image? Self-image is simply the conception one has of one's self and the assessment of one's personal worth.⁵ When we suffer any form of abuse or maltreatment by others, oftentimes our self-image is damaged. The people who abused us acted as a mirror, a distorted mirror, reflecting false messages about who we are as children of God. These distorted images affect the way we feel and think about ourselves, and they also affect our relationships to God and others. The truth is that what

has been mirrored back to us is not who we are.⁶ Who we are is who God created us to be. Have you ever actually wondered, "Who am I?"

If so, you are not alone. Many of us have been searching for the answer to this question our whole lives. And if you were mistreated or abused in any way when you were growing up, you might have developed a people-pleasing personality in an attempt to gain the love and acceptance you never received, but still long for. When you live to please others, you sacrifice who you really are, who God created you to be. And what you develop is what's known as an *adaptive* or *false self*, a self who is not true to your own feelings, emotions, thoughts, wants, or needs.⁷ You live to fulfill the expectations of others. You must learn to live out of your true self. This is why this lesson is focused on learning about who God created you to be, so you can be free to be yourself—free to become the woman God intended you to be.



What thoughts come to your mind when you think about yourself?

Who are you according to God's truth? Today let us start from the beginning in Genesis 1:26-27, 31, and then we will look at other passages—Psalm 139:13-16; Ephesians 2:10, and Romans 8:14-17.

Learning God's Truth

In Genesis 1:26-27, 31 we read:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. . . .³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

Please fill in the blanks for verse 26.

God said, "Let _____ make humankind in _____ our image, according to _____ likeness."

Who do you think God is referring to when he says “us” or “our”? _____

Amazing! From the very beginning, we see the triune God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—working together to create humankind. And we are created in the very image of the Triune God. Isn't that the most amazing reality? And not only that, but both male and female were created *equal* by God. There is no hierarchy in God's creation of humankind. We are all one, and we have been stamped with the very image and likeness of God.

What do you think it means that God created you in God's image and likeness? _____

In what way do you resemble God, or what attributes of God do you reflect? _____

What attributes would you like to reflect? _____

Share how it makes you feel that God created you in his very own image and likeness. _____

What is the one adjective that describes God's creation? (v. 31). _____

How do you see yourself? _____

How would you like to see yourself? _____

Please take a few minutes to pray. Ask God to help you to see yourself the way God sees you. Continue in prayer as the Lord leads.



Now let us turn to Psalm 139:13-16.

¹³ *For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.*

Name the two adjectives that describe how God made you (v. 14).

1) _____

2) _____

Do you believe this about yourself? _____

If not, what would it take for you to believe this truth? _____

Did it ever occur to you that God knew you before he created you? Do you believe that God created you because he loves you so and has special plans and purposes for you?

You are an amazing creation, uniquely designed and intricately formed and knit together. God's eyes beheld your unformed substance. This means that God knew you and loved you before you came into being, and knows all the days that were formed for you. Imagine! God knew you before you were born and knows how your life will unfold according to his divinely ordained plans for you. You are precious to God!

Reflect on your thoughts and feelings about what you mean to God.



Let us now turn to the Ephesians passage.

Read Ephesians 2:10.

For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

From your mother's womb, God created you in his image and likeness and he saw you, his creation, as good! Now in your new birth, as a believer in Christ, what is God's desire for your life?

What do you believe God's unique desire is for you? _____

What vocation has God called you to or might God be calling you to? _____

Take a few minutes now thanking God for creating you. Pray that God will fulfill his purposes in your life and that God will use all you have gone through to bless and glorify his name.



Let us end this week's study by reading **Romans 8:14-17**.

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

How do you know that you are a child of God (v.16) ? _____

You can have full and complete confidence that you are a child of God because God's Spirit bears witness to your spirit.

In addition to being a child of God, what other privileges do you have in relationship to God? _____

What does this mean that you are God's heir and a joint heir with Christ? Do you understand the magnitude of this? What is your responsibility before God? What rich relationships you have with the Triune God! You not only belong to God as his child, you are an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. Wow! What a privilege to belong to God's family.

Share your thoughts on what it means for you to belong to the family of God. _____

After working through this week's lesson, "My Image, a Reflection of God's Image," please take a few minutes and answer the question "Who am I?" by making an "I am" list.⁸ Make the list as long as you want. Place the phrase "I am" at the top of a blank page and list all those "I am's" that describe you as God's child. For instance, you might say, "I am a child of God," "I am loved," "I am faithful," or "I am a teacher"—whatever comes to your heart and mind.



Experiencing God

Choose one of these two exercises, or if you have time enjoy both.

1) Mirror Exercise, approximately 20 minutes: “Your image, a reflection of God’s image.”

Sit or stand about two feet from a mirror. Gaze into the mirror looking for Christ in you. Try to look beyond your eyes into the person God created you to be.

What do you see?

Do you see pain? Do you see love? Do you see sadness? Do you see life?

Allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you look at yourself. Ask the Lord to help you see yourself the way God sees you. Pray for guidance and the desire to surrender to whatever comes to you.

Who are you? What thoughts, feelings or emotions arise?

Is this comfortable? Uncomfortable? What is God saying to you?

Allow your thoughts and feelings to flow; do not hinder the work of the Spirit.

When you are done, take some time to journal your reflections on this exercise.

The purpose of this exercise is to see beyond your appearance into the person God created you to be.

Hopefully, this exercise will help you grow in loving yourself and loving others, as you also try to look beyond others’ appearances and see Christ in them.



2) Contemplative Exercise

Sit in a comfortable, relaxed position, and allow yourself to rest in Christ. Spend five minutes in solitude and silence in God's presence. After five minutes, allow God to speak to you.

What is God saying? What is God trying to communicate to you? Does he want you to know how loved you are? Does God want you to understand how important you are to him? What Scripture, if any, comes to mind?

Respond to God. Share your heart with him. Tell him how you truly feel, and be as open and candid as you desire. God desires your openness and honesty. Tell God what you need and pray that he will meet this need. When you are finished, if you are doing this as a group, take a few minutes to share your thoughts and feelings of your experience with others. Allow them to affirm you.

If you are alone, spend some time journaling your reflections of this time with God. Did you enjoy it? Did you feel safe with God? Did you sense God's presence? Allow your thoughts and feelings to flow unhindered as you journal.



Sharing God's Love

This week, think of one woman who needs to grow in the knowledge of God's love, one who needs to believe that she is "fearfully and wonderfully made." Each day of the week, spend a few minutes in prayer asking God to help her see herself the way God sees her, and that she would grow in the knowledge of God's love and, in turn, learn to love herself in healthy ways. If the opportunity arises, share God's love with her in a tangible way. Pay her a compliment, write her an encouraging note, sing a song to her, send her an e-card, or do what comes naturally for you.

You have now finished your second lesson. I pray that God has blessed your study time and that you are experiencing God in amazing ways! In lesson 3, "God's True Nature," you will learn about the character of God and heal any distorted images of God you have held.

Lesson Three: God's True Nature

You are an amazing woman of God, created in the very image of God. As you gaze in the mirror each day, see the beauty of the Lord radiating from your countenance. How lovely you are, God's own special workmanship designed especially for God's pleasure and purpose. Is it not thrilling to know how much you mean to God? What powerful truths to assimilate! Assimilating such truths for survivors is a process, though; sometimes it is a life-long process. Since the ravages of abuse attack the very soul of a child of God, it is commonplace to struggle not only with one's self-image, but also with one's image or perception of God. As mentioned in our previous lesson, our perpetrators (or caregivers, parents, significant others) act as mirrors—distorted mirrors—sending false messages about who we are

as children of God. And these distorted images not only affect the way we feel and think about ourselves, but they also affect the way we view God.

Now add to these realities the fact that we also may have been mistreated, misunderstood, or misinformed in the church by a pastor or Christian leader who did not understand the dynamics of abuse and, unfortunately, helped reinforce our negative perceptions of God.

What do you really believe about God; the one whom you image? Is God loving and compassionate? Is God faithful to his promises? Is God trustworthy? Is God a just God? Does God desire intimacy with his people? And is God's desire for us to be in healthy, loving, intimate relationships with others?



What do you really believe about God; the one whom you image?
Record your thoughts on the lines below.

In this lesson, we will grapple with some of these important questions about God's nature and try to help heal our image of God.

Before you begin, ask God to bless your time spent with him and to open your heart and mind as you study his word this week.

Before we delve into the Scriptures, please take a few moments and jot down some of your images or perceptions of God. How do you see God—not what the Bible says or what you have been taught, but how do you honestly image God? Many women that I have encouraged over the years in their journeys to healing and wholeness have held distorted views of God. Some have seen God as cold and distant; others have seen God as critical, stern, and abusive, like a taskmaster trying to make them jump through hoops to measure up. Others have seen God as detached, angry, and uncaring.¹⁰ Some have seen God as an abandoner, one who abandons his people when they do not obey.¹¹ Others have seen God as unreliable and untrustworthy, and still others have imaged God as unfair.¹²

Can you relate to these images of God? Although I imagine you can relate, these images are anything but true. They are just that—*merely false images* of God, and they do not reflect God's true nature.

So who is God? What does the Bible say about God's true nature? Let us learn more accurately, who God is. Oh, Lord, please bring revelation to our hearts and minds as we study your word.

In our first lesson, we learned that God loves us so much that he willingly gave up his only Son on our behalf. There is no greater love than this. Thus, we know that God is a loving God, for *God is love*. Let us review one Scripture passage about the deep love of God: Isaiah 43:1-4. We will also look at Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 12:6; Hebrews 6:13-15; Isaiah 61:1-4; Matthew 9:20, and Isaiah 54:1-7.

Learning God's Truth

Read **Isaiah 43:1-4**.

¹But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

No matter what we go through in life, what should our reaction be to fear according to this passage? (v. 1)

Read this passage through once or twice and write down everything that God says about you.

In the same way that God loves the nation of Israel, God loves you. God is even willing to give nations in exchange for you. God loves and accepts you as his covenant child; this is a reality. Spend a few minutes in prayer thanking God for his thoughts and feelings toward you.



Let us move on to understanding more clearly God's faithfulness. Although one of your images of God may be unreliable or untrustworthy, God is unswervingly faithful to you.

Please read Deuteronomy 7:9.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations”

According to this passage, how does God show his faithfulness to you, his covenant child? _____

What is a covenant? _____

How long does God maintain his covenant with you? _____

What do you think “a thousand generations” represents? Explain. _____

God is a God of intimate relationships, and, from the beginning, he made promises to his beloved people. God calls us to live in a covenant relationship with him.



Please read Psalm 12:6 and Hebrews 6:13-15.

Psalm 12:6: *The promises of the LORD are promises that are pure, silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.*

What do you think it means that the Lord’s promises are “like silver refined in a furnace?” _____

What does it mean for promises to be “purified seven times?” _____

Hebrews 6:13-15: ¹³ *When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, “I will surely bless you and multiply you.”¹⁵ And thus Abraham,¹ having patiently endured, obtained the promise.*

To whom did God swear by when he made a promise to Abraham? _____

Is there any greater name in heaven and on earth to swear by? _____

What was God's promise to Abraham? _____

Did God keep his promise to Abraham? (see v. 16) Explain. _____

While Abraham waited for the fulfillment of his promise, what action did he take? _____

What special promise(s) has God spoken to your heart? _____

If God's promise has not been realized, how might you respond to God while you await its fulfillment? _____

Write down God's promise to you and pray for patience and faithfulness while you await your heart's desire. How are you doing? Are you beginning to image God more accurately as a God of steadfast love and faithfulness, one who keeps his covenant to a thousand generations? I pray that you are. Let us now learn more about God as compassion.



Read Isaiah 61:1-4 and Matthew 9:20.

Isaiah 61:1-4: *'The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; ³ to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. ⁴ They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.*

Isaiah 61:1-4 is a prophecy about Jesus, the coming Messiah. Can you imagine, Isaiah prophesied Jesus' coming and mission to the church two thousand years before his birth?

What was Jesus' mission to the church (vv. 1-2) ? _____

What is the good news? Does the good news include binding up the brokenhearted? Explain. _____

What do you think it means "to bind up the brokenhearted"? How do you "bind" up one's (broken) heart? _____

What is the imagery that comes to mind for you? _____

What does a garland symbolize (v. 3)? _____

What is the difference between a garland and ashes? _____

Why exchange a garland for ashes? _____

What does the symbol of "oil of gladness" mean to you? What is it replacing? _____

Can you understand the depth of God's compassion for the brokenhearted? _____

What does God's compassion look like for you? How does God show his compassion? _____

Can you think of another Scripture passage that demonstrates God's compassion (see Matthew 9:20)? _____

Share your thoughts and feelings.



Let us turn to Isaiah 54:1-17 and read it through.
You may want to reread the passage as you seek to answer the questions.

¹ Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate woman will be more than the children of her that is married, says the LORD.
² Enlarge the site of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. ³ For you will spread out to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will settle the desolate towns. ⁴ Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. ⁶ For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God. ⁷ For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. ⁸ In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer. ⁹ This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. ¹⁰ For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you. ¹¹ O afflicted one, storm-tossed, and not comforted, I am about to set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. ¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies, your gates of jewels, and all your wall of precious stones. ¹³ All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the prosperity of your children. ¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. ¹⁵ If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you. ¹⁶ See it is I who have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and produces a weapon fit for its purpose; I have also created the ravager to destroy. ¹⁷ No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, says the LORD.

Share how this passage speaks to you. What can you relate to? _____

Although your suffering has been most painful, one day it will seem like "a brief moment" when you experience the depth of God's compassion for you as God gathers you into his intimate embrace.

Share your thoughts:

According to this passage, how is the Lord like a husband? _____

Does this imagery comfort you? _____

According to this passage, does God desire intimacy or closeness with you? What words or phrases bring you to this conclusion? _____

What would intimacy with God look like for you? _____

In this passage, what images of God do you see? _____

Do you see the other attributes we have already studied (love, faithfulness)? _____

List the verses where you see these attributes recorded: _____



Experiencing God

Please find a quiet, comfortable place to be alone with God. Close your eyes as you rest in God. Try to center in Christ, surrendering all distracting thoughts into God's care. Spend about 10 minutes in silent prayer. Think of yourself as soaking in the presence of God. When you are finished, take five or ten minutes to journal any thoughts or feelings that came to you while you were praying. What was God saying to you? Did God reveal anything about his word to you while you were centering in Him? If so, what did he impress on your heart and mind?



Sharing God's Love

Think of an attribute of God that you most need to grow in (love, gentleness, kindness, patience, etc). Allow God to use you to share this attribute with another person. For example, be patient with someone in your life who ordinarily may drive you to act impatiently. Or express God's love to someone who is not easy to love. Pray before you act and allow God to use you to bless his beloved child.



You're amazing, and you've done tremendous work! It's not easy reorienting your thinking about God's nature, but it is refreshing to know the truth and to be able to continue to grow in understanding who God is and who you are in relation to God. Lesson 4, "Expressing Your God-Given Emotions," will encourage you to learn to process your unwanted emotions in healthy, life-renewing ways. I pray that you will experience freedom in expressing and processing your emotions.

Lesson Four: Expressing Your God-Given Emotions

This week we are going to talk about our God-given emotions and learn how to express them freely and positively. As survivors of abuse, we have felt a wide range of negative emotions and, often-times, we have not possessed the tools to process them in healthy, constructive ways. Rather than trying to understand *why* we feel the way we do and *what* we can do to change things, we often numb out or repress these painful, confusing, and unwanted emotions. Unfortunately, we end up harming ourselves further.

However, the truth remains: God made us emotional beings, and this is a good thing! God gave us emotions as an indicator to help us understand what we are feeling and why, and to help us determine what we need so we can lovingly care for ourselves. Therefore, instead of allowing our emotions to overwhelm us and to cause us to self-destruct, we need to learn to express them in positive and life-renewing ways.

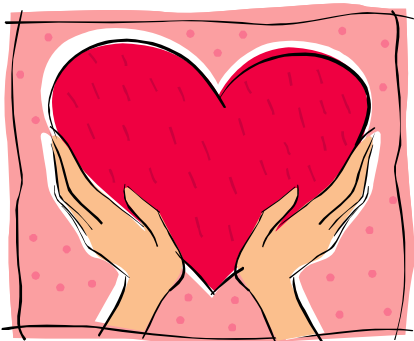
How many of you struggle on a regular basis with negative feelings such as guilt, shame, anger, depression, or rejection? Would it not be a wonderful thing to learn how to handle your feelings and emotions so that they do not continue to drain the energy and life out of you? After all, the Bible tells us that Jesus came not only to give us life, but he came to give us abundant life. And part of living life abundantly means to be free to feel our feelings—and not just the negative ones—and to be the women God created us to be.

So I would like you to consider the following three questions: 1) Do you want to be emotionally whole? 2) Do you want to learn more about yourself in relationship to your emotions and learn to express them in healthy, constructive, and life-

sustaining ways? 3) Do you want to be free to express your authentic self, whatever it is that you are feeling, so that you can be true to yourself and others and have the intimacy in your relationships that you have always longed for? Do I hear a resounding “Yes” to all three? If so, go for it!

This is definitely possible with God’s help and with a deeper self-understanding as emotional beings. Today, let us take a journey in the Bible and learn what God says about who we are as emotional beings and how we can embrace our feelings and emotions and constructively deal with them, so that they become our friends and not our enemies holding us captive. We will also learn how to change our thinking patterns and negative belief systems so we are not living with debilitating feelings and emotions, but more pleasant and enlivening ones instead. Before we move on to our Bible passages, let us first define the words “emotion” and “feeling.”

According to Archibald Hart, the dean of the graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, in his book called *Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions*, he says that feelings are a part of one’s emotion. “They are the part of emotion that breaks through into our awareness. A feeling is the sensation or bodily state that accompanies the experience of the emotion. An emotion refers to the deeper, underlying state that stirs or agitates us, whether or not we are aware of it as feeling. The term emotion, therefore, refers to the state of our being. Feeling is how we experience that state.”¹³ Moreover, Dr. Hart believes that “People feel what they think and their emotions are the complete sum of all their thoughts.”¹⁴ What a profound truth for us to meditate on.



Pray: Please take a few moments and ask God to give you insight into yourself and your emotions this week. Write your prayer on the lines below.

Learning God's Truth

In lesson 4, we will study Daniel 5:6-12 and 1 Samuel 1:1-20.

Please turn now to the Book of Daniel and read Daniel 5:6-12.

⁶Then the king's face turned pale, and his thoughts terrified him. His limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. ⁷The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the diviners; and the king said to the wise men of Babylon, "Whoever can read this writing and tell me its interpretation shall be clothed in purple, have a chain of gold around his neck, and rank third in the kingdom." ⁸Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king the interpretation. ⁹Then King Belshazzar became greatly terrified and his face turned pale, and his lords were perplexed. ¹⁰The queen, when she heard the discussion of the king and his lords, came into the banqueting hall. The queen said, "O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts terrify you or your face grow pale. ¹¹There is a man in your kingdom who is endowed with a spirit of the holy gods. In the days of your father he was found to have enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and diviners, ¹²because an excellent spirit, knowledge, and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation."

In the Bible passage that we read (v.10), we see that King Belshazzar's wife was warning him not to allow his thoughts to trouble or terrify him as a result of the unpleasant news he had received. We understand from this how easy it is to allow the thoughts in our minds and the beliefs in our hearts to affect the way we feel. In this case, the King, having an unrepentant heart, really had something to worry about as Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall (vv.22-23). However, oftentimes, although we are beloved children of God, instead of trusting that God is going to take care of us, we worry and fret needlessly, causing many unpleasant feelings.

Take a few moments and think of a time recently when you were feeling good, and then your emotions suddenly changed for the worse. What happened to affect this change? Record the sequence of events that precipitated the change.

It is true that our thoughts and our negative beliefs affect our emotions.

I remember when I was newly married, and I was going through major inner healing, how easy it was for me to fly off the handle at my husband because of my thinking and negative beliefs. For example, I would expect my husband to come home at a certain time from work, and when he would stroll through the door three hours late, I would feel hurt and angry.

While I was patiently waiting for him to come home, my mind was working overtime creating all kinds of scenarios. I was imagining that he was with another woman, or that he was doing something behind my back. At the time, I was also reminded of what my mother went through when she used to sit and wait for my father to come home from work—and he was always late. So, in this case, both my thoughts and my beliefs about marriage affected the way I felt. In addition, what I felt was hurt, disappointment, rejection, anger, and resentment. Now, before I discuss what I did to change my thinking and beliefs so that I could live a more peaceful and fruitful existence, we will next look at the story of Hannah in the Book of 1 Samuel.



Please read I Samuel 1:1-20, which is the inspiring story of Hannah.

"There was a certain man of Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham son of Elihu son of Tohu son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. ³ Now this man used to go up year by year from his town to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD. ⁴ On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; ⁵ but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. ⁷ So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. ⁸ Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" ⁹ After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. ¹⁰ She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. ¹¹ She made this vow: 'O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.' ¹² As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. ¹⁴ So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." ¹⁵ But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." ¹⁷ Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." ¹⁸ And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer. ¹⁹ They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

Describe what Hannah may have been feeling (v.5-10) _____

Do you think that Hannah was depressed? _____

What words in this passage lead you to believe that she was depressed? _____

When do you think that Hannah's sad feelings over her barrenness changed: before or after she gave birth to Samuel? _____

Share in your own words what you think happened to change her feelings. _____

How do you think that God felt about Hannah's sadness and feelings of rejections? Do you think God cared about Hannah's feelings? _____

If so, then why do you think that Hannah had to wait so long to have a child? _____

Hannah was special to God. In fact, Hannah was so special that God had a unique plan and purpose for her life. I believe with all my heart that God cared deeply over the way Hannah felt. Though her suffering endured for years, did God forget her? No, God never forgets his beloved.

This lesson will teach you how to get in touch with your true feelings and emotions and how to process them in healthy ways so that they do not overwhelm you or control you. Although Hannah may have felt abandoned by God, he knew the plans he had for her. Hannah was called upon by God to intercede, not only for a son, but for an entire nation. She was faithful to God and he blessed her beyond her highest expectations and prayers. He did not forget or neglect her. In God's perfect timing, Hannah became pregnant. And we know that Hannah believed God before she conceived, because her countenance changed (v. 18). She was joyful once more because she knew beyond any doubt that God had heard her prayer and she rejoiced immeasurably in God's faithfulness and unconditional love.

Do you believe that God cares about you and your feelings just as he cared for Hannah's? Explain.



So now that we know that our thoughts and beliefs affect our emotions, and that God does indeed care how we feel, how do we change our thinking and beliefs so that we can experience more pleasant and desirable emotions? Now, of course, we are not perfect and will not always be able to feel good about everything in our lives, yet it is possible to experience a more peaceful and emotionally stable life.

The *first* thing that I believe you can do when you are feeling a negative emotion is to take a few moments and ask yourself, “What am I feeling, and why?” Get in touch with the emotion, feel it, and try to understand what is going on within you. (And if you have time, you can monitor your emotions by keeping a journal of what you are feeling and why.) For instance, if you are feeling guilty over some event, discern whether this guilt is founded or not. In other words, is it false or true guilt? If your conscience has a reason to feel guilty, then take this problem to God and repent of whatever it is that is causing you the guilt feeling and receive God’s forgiveness. If you determine that your guilt is unfounded, that you really did not do anything wrong, then ask God to relieve you of this inappropriate response to the guilt. If you continue to struggle with this, please talk to a friend or a trusted counselor about this problem. Remember God wants you to be healthy in your emotions.

Take a few moments and think about a recent negative emotion that you felt. Name the emotion. What were you feeling? Why were you feeling that way? Share what comes.

A *second* and very important thing you can do to be free of unwanted emotions is to learn to take control of them—do not allow them to control you. And how do you do this? As James Allen says, “A noble and God-like character is not a thing of favor or chance, but is the natural result of continued effort in right thinking . . . she is the maker of her character. . . if she will *watch, control, and alter* her thoughts, tracing their effects upon herself, upon others, and upon her life circumstances.”¹⁵

In addition, I would add that the Holy Spirit changes us (and our thinking). As we surrender our thoughts to God, we will continuously be transformed in our thinking. Therefore, you can change your emotions if you *watch, control, and alter* your thoughts, of course, with the help of the Holy Spirit. For example, how did I change my thinking about my husband coming home late and how did this affect my emotions and ultimately my marriage?

Watch—I began to pay attention to my thinking processes. I noticed when my mind was becoming suspicious and when I was feeling insecure and was getting ready to explode in anger when my husband walked through the door late.

Control—I got in touch with the underlying feelings of mistrust, fear of abandonment, and insecurity, and then I began to turn the situation over to God. I asked God to help me to trust him even if I still did not fully trust my husband. As my trust in God began to increase, I stopped worrying about my husband’s lateness. If he was late, he was late, and I did not expect that he would necessarily be home on time every night. I grew so much in my trust of God that I knew that God would never let me down even if my husband did. I knew that *God loved me* and that God would see me through. Even if my husband proved to be unfaithful (as a worst-case scenario), God would continue to be faithful to me.

Alter—And as my thoughts changed gradually, I became much calmer, more peaceful, and more emotionally stable, a much easier person to live with. My security is rooted in God and not in another human being. This new way of thinking not only changed my life for the better, but my husband eventually came to trust in Christ because he saw such a dramatic difference in my reactions and behavior. Changing my thinking in a few areas affected the way I began to react and respond emotionally to many other situations. Of course, I am continuously being transformed in my mind and heart as I will never arrive, but I am thankful for what God has done already in my life.

A *third* thing that you can do if you are struggling with deep-seated emotions, such as shame over some behavior, is to try to get at the root of the issue. This might mean that you engage a minister, a friend, a counselor, or even a small group experience to help with this search. Oftentimes, if a person continuously feels a deep sense of shame, underlying the shame could be a fear of abandonment or some abusive event that precipitated this. God wants you healed from the inside out, and, at times, you have to travel back into the

past to understand why you feel the way you do or why you behave the way you do. This takes time, for healing is a process. And if you truly desire wholeness, I firmly believe that God will bring about this God-given desire. Often, getting to the root of an issue requires educating yourself by reading excellent books related to the topics you are dealing with. The best counseling is bringing awareness to you. Incidentally, the book by Dr. Hart, *Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions*, is one of the best books I have ever read on learning to deal with emotions in healthy ways. Another great book to help foster emotional and spiritual growth is the book *Unbound* by Neal Lozano. It is, by far, the best book I have read and practiced that helps facilitate inner healing and deliverance in God's children. It is biblically sound and theologically well-balanced, and offers a practical and loving approach to healing and deliverance.

A *fourth* thing, but probably the most important thing, that you can do is to continue to be faithful to God in your spiritual disciplines: Bible study, devotions, prayer, quiet, and solitude. This is crucial if you want to live in emotional freedom. Practicing the spiritual disciplines will bring about deep healing and cause you to mature in the fruit of the Holy Spirit. And in doing so, you will grow in intimacy with God and learn to hear God's voice for direction for your life and ministry. God loves it when we spend time with him. He wants to heal your broken heart and rid you of unpleasant and irritating emotions. Come and sit at the feet of your Beloved and learn more about his unconditional love and acceptance of you.



Experiencing God

Choose one of the two exercises:

1) Sit in a safe, quiet, and comfortable place with God. Pray in silence for five minutes. Then ask God to show you how you see yourself. Journal what comes to your mind. Then ask God to help you to see yourself the way God sees you. Remember, your thoughts affect the way you feel. Then take a few minutes and meditate on Zephaniah 3:17-20. Read this passage through slowly once and pay attention to any word or phrase that speaks to you. What is God saying to you? How does this make you feel? What feelings does this passage evoke? Read the passage a second time and respond to God by thanking God for who he created you to be. Journal your experience; write whatever comes.

2) Take time to process your emotions. Think of a recent negative emotion you felt. What do you think was the root of this negative emotion? Share what comes to you. What were you thinking? How could you change your thinking to feel differently? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

You've done great work today on working through the process of understanding your emotions and trying to pay attention to any wrong thinking that contributes to your unwanted feelings and emotions.

End this lesson by taking five or ten minutes and soak in the love of God. Sit quietly before the Lord and allow him to minister to you.

Sharing God's Love

Think about someone this week who you know struggles with expressing their God-given emotions. Either pray for him or her to be able to express emotions more freely and handle the negative emotions more constructively, or talk to him or her about what you've been learning. Perhaps this will enable that person to begin to live more freely in the area of emotions.



Brava! Another lesson is completed. You're doing wonderfully as you process and work through some painful emotions and other issues. May God give you the courage and strength to keep persevering in the faith as you pursue healing and wholeness. Next week in lesson 5, "Living in Freedom," you will learn more about what it means that Christ came to set captives free and wants you to live life abundantly! I pray that you will accept your freedom in Christ and live the rich, abundant life that Christ died for you to have!

Lesson Five: Living in Freedom

This past week, we learned how to express and process our human emotions in life-renewing ways. It is surely a freeing experience when we can do this. However, living and experiencing true freedom in Christ includes more than of an honest expression of our emotions and feelings. But what does it truly mean to live freely in Christ? How often do you hear others say, "I want to be free in Christ. Oh, Lord set me free." I'm sure you have also longed for, prayed about, and shared your desire for freedom. Well, God desires freedom for you more than you do, more than you can imagine! After all, for what purpose did Christ die? What

was Christ's mission on earth? Does not the Bible tell us that Christ came "to set the captives free"?

This week, we are going to learn what it means to live in freedom in Christ. If you, in any way, desire to experience a greater measure of freedom in Christ, read on and you will learn what it means to *accept your freedom* in Christ, and what you can do to help facilitate freedom in your own life and the lives of others so that you can fulfill your God-given destiny in Christ Jesus.

For this lesson, we will read Luke 4:15-19; Exodus 3:7-9, 16-17; Psalm 103:6; John 8:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Matthew 6:9-14; 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12, and Deuteronomy 5:9-10.



Pray: Please ask the Lord to lead you and guide you as you study his word this week, and to allow you to experience a greater measure of freedom in your life, so that you will be bubbling over with an unspeakable joy and zest for living, unlike anything you have ever experienced before. Write your prayer on the lines below:

Learning God's Truth

Read Luke 4:15-19.

¹⁵ *He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.* ¹⁶ *When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,* ¹⁷ *and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:* ¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,* ¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

In lesson 3, we read Isaiah 61:1-3 and now in this passage in Luke, we see the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus' life. Absolutely amazing, is it not?

What is Jesus' mission to the church (vv. 18-19) ? _____

How do you see God's compassion toward his people in relation to Jesus' mission? _____

What do you believe it means, "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives"? _____

In what ways have you felt captive (or imprisoned)? _____

In what ways would you like to experience greater freedom? Write down whatever comes to you. _____

What does the word "oppressed" mean in this context? _____

The root word for "oppress" in Hebrew (Isa 61) means to "force one to submit" or to "inflict undue pain."¹⁶ God does not want his children to live this way. He wants to release them from unhealthy ties that keep people in unnecessary bondage. Sometimes, it takes learning to set *healthy boundaries* and learning to care lovingly for yourself.



Read Exodus 3:7-9, 16-17 and Psalm 103:6.

Exodus 3:7-9 ⁷ Then the LORD said, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

Exodus 3:16-17 ¹⁶ Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying; I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.¹⁷ I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey."

Psalm 103:6 The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.

Can you identify in any way with the Israelites' enslavement or heavy burden of oppression? (See Exodus 1:8-14) Share your heart.

How did God act to free his people? _____

Do you believe that God understands your suffering and wants to put an end to it? _____

What is "a good and broad place, a land flowing with milk and honey"? (Exodus 3:17) _____

What would this look like or feel like for you? What is your heart's desire? _____

What does "a broad place, a land flowing with milk and honey" have to do with freedom? _____

When we read that Jesus "came to set the captives free," this means that Jesus lovingly and sacrificially gave his life to release you from sin (including sins perpetrated against you), any kind of unhealthy bondage or oppression, so that you can thrive in being the woman God created you to be. Since all things are possible with God, then God desires to bring you your heart's desire.

Take a moment and pray your deepest desire.



God does not want his people living in oppressive conditions. God is loving and just. God will indeed act, but sometimes, God needs you to act along with him. You can act by learning to set healthy boundaries and limits for what you will tolerate.

God's people should never tolerate abuse, and action must be taken to assure one's freedom. You must do everything you can to be free from any kind of unhealthy bondage or oppression. This is never God's will for your life! Sometimes, this means using tough love with a loved one, or seeking help from a trusted friend, an understanding pastor, or a professional counselor. At times, this requires taking drastic measures, such as separating from an abusive spouse or loved one. Divorce may be necessary if the abuse continues. Each case is unique. This is where you can really benefit from an understanding pastor or a professional, compassionate, and experienced counselor.

God desires for you to live life abundantly and to enjoy the freedom from sin (including sins against you) and oppression for which he died. God desires for you to be the women of God that he created you to be, and this means using *all* your gifts and talents for his glory. God wants you to experience such freedom that you are able to enjoy the rich, abundant life that he came to give you. With God, since heaven is the limit, you should be free to be all that God intended you to be—free to love (including loving yourself), dance, sing, and laugh; free to create through the arts; free to express your honest and true emotions and feelings; and free to know (and experience) how deeply loved you are loved by God—that you are indeed *accepted in the Beloved*. Do not wait; you have missed so much already. Go forth into your God-given destiny and do not let anything or anyone hold you back. Be free in Christ. Live free.

Maintaining Our Freedom through Spiritual Disciplines

Read John 8:31-32.

³¹ *Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

How will you know the truth? _____

What makes you free? _____

Why is it important to read the word every day? _____



Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Matthew 6:9-14.

1 Thessalonians 5:15-18 ¹⁵ *See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

How often shall we pray? (1 Thessalonians 5:17) _____

What is God's will for us (v. 18)? _____

Matthew 6:9-14 ⁹ *Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread. ¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. ¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

Should forgiveness be a part of our daily prayer life? _____

How shall we ask God to "forgive us our sins"? (v. 12) _____

What does God do when we forgive others (v. 14)? _____

How important is forgiveness in experiencing freedom? Explain. _____

When I first led support groups for survivors of abuse, I was told not to force the issue of forgiveness since *forgiveness is a process*. First, we must realize how our perpetrator's sin (and victimization) has harmed and damaged us, and how it has affected our lives, before we attempt to forgive. In other words, we must understand what we are actually forgiving. Second, we can forgive even if our "debtor" has never taken ownership for his or her sin—even if that person never admits or confesses the wrongdoing. Third, releasing our "debtor" is in no way letting a perpetrator off the hook or exonerating him or her from any retribution. What that person did was sinfully wrong, and the Lord will judge him or her for the wrongdoing. (Please read chapter 10, *Mending the Soul*—one of the best chapters I've ever read on the topic of forgiveness.)

Forgiveness should most definitely be a part of our daily prayer life. It is so freeing when we are able, through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, to forgive someone from the heart. When I was finally able to forgive one of my perpetrators, it was as if someone removed ten thousand pounds from my back.

We learned that one crucial spiritual discipline is daily Bible reading. What is another important discipline for maintaining our freedom?

Read Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12.

Matthew 14:23 ²³ *And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.*

Mark 6:46 *After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.*

Luke 6:12 *Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.*

What was Jesus going to do in each situation? _____

Why did Jesus choose to be alone with the Father rather than being with the crowds? _____

What was Jesus seeking in his alone time? _____

What do you seek when you spend time alone with God? _____

Jesus is God in the flesh; and if anyone knew the will of God, it was Jesus. But Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, always chose to move away from the crowds in order to be alone with the Father to pray.

What should we learn from Jesus' example? _____

The first spiritual discipline is reading God's word, and the second is prayer.

What is the third spiritual discipline that we should practice, using Jesus as our example? _____

I imagine you are wondering what this practice has to do with freedom in Christ. How will this practice bring more freedom to your life? How will this practice of silence and solitude help you to maintain your freedom? Write down your thoughts, reflections, and ideas. (For example, hearing God's voice better, knowing God's will for our lives, developing intimacy, learning to rest and be rather than do, or have more to give others when we meet with Jesus.)



Read **Deuteronomy 5:9–10**. ⁹ *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me,* ¹⁰ *but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation¹ of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

How do you feel about this passage? _____

What do you think it means? _____

Moses is reciting the Ten Commandments to Israel, reminding them of their covenant relationship to God (see v. 8).

God shows steadfast love to you to the thousandth generation—God is amazingly faithful to his own. But sometimes our lives have been very difficult and painful because of our parents and grandparents' sins. Oftentimes, I have felt that I was paying the price for the sins of my family, the generational curses. I see a direct relationship to my parents' sins and the difficulties I have had in my marriage. Oftentimes, we unconsciously bond with what is familiar and we end up repeating our family patterns.

Shortly after I was married, I woke up one day and realized that I was living out my parents' unhealthy marriage. I was acting like my mother, and my husband was acting like my father in his behavior. It was as if I were reenacting my parent's marriage (the unconscious choice we make to marry someone). I knew then that I did not want to go on this way for the rest of my life. I began working on my own issues and was determined to break the curse of the generations over my life. It was a slow healing process, but what I eventually learned was that I needed to incorporate some very important practices into my daily life if I wanted to live and maintain my Christian freedom.



Experiencing God

Jesus is the Master Creator (Gen 1). He created you and made you unique and precious in his eyes. Since you are created in God's image, you too have the ability to create through various art forms. Take a block of time to create something that *symbolizes your freedom* or the freedom you desire. Begin by spending a few minutes in silence, and then ask God to guide your hands and your heart. Write a poem or a story. Compose a song. Paint or draw a picture. Take a photo. Sculpt a piece of clay. Sew or knit a piece of fabric. Create whatever comes, allowing the Spirit to lead you giving you fresh new ideas.

Sharing God's Love

Write a letter or call someone in your family and share what God is teaching you, or do an act of kindness for that person as an expression of God's love for you and for them.



I trust that you learned a great deal more about living freely in Christ. Go for it! Do what you need to do to continue to seek freedom from whatever is hindering you. Your freedom was purchased through the blood of Christ. Break free and become the person God desires for you to be!

Well, you have one more lesson, "Discovering Your Call," and my prayer is that you will find meaning and purpose in all that you've gone through, and that you will most definitely fulfill your God-given destiny in Christ. You are an amazing child of God, and God has great plans to prosper you as you use your gifts and talents to glorify God's name.

Lesson Six: Discovering Your Call

Last week, we learned that God desires for us to live in freedom in Christ and to be the women God created us to be. This includes using all our gifts and abilities to serve God. No matter what we endure in life, no matter how difficult or painful our circumstances, one thing is certain: God will use all our suffering to bring glory to his name. Nothing we go through is without meaning and purpose. When we find meaning and purpose in our suffering, it offers great hope and encouragement to continue on the journey.

Have you ever wondered, “What is the meaning and purpose of all I’ve gone through in this life? And how could God possibly use me or my life circumstances to bring glory to his name?” Discovering your meaning and purpose in life has a lot to do with *discovering your call*. God has created you in his own image, and, in doing so, he has uniquely gifted you unlike anyone else. Let us take time this week to discover your unique calling in Christ.

Pray: Please take a few moments and ask God to show you your *unique gifts and calling* so that you can understand yourself better and use *all* that God created you to be to bring glory and honor to his name.

Write your prayer on the lines below.



Learning God's Truth

For lesson 6, we will read Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 12:4-9; Ephesians 2:10, 4:11-13; Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 2:12-13; and Matthew 22:37-39.

God created you with unique gifts in order to fulfill God’s purposes for your life.

Read Acts 17:28; 1 Corinthians 12:4-9; Ephesians 2:10.

Acts 17:28 *For in him we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.”*

1 Corinthians 12:4-9 *“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;⁵ and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.*

Ephesians 4:11-13 *“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

Ephesians 2:10 *For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

Fill in the blanks (Acts 17:28). In God we _____, and _____ and _____.

What does this mean to you? Share your thoughts. _____

Of all the spiritual gifts that Paul mentions, which gifts do you have (1 Corinthians 12)? How are you using them or how do you see yourself using them in the future? _____

Why do we have gifts (Eph 4:12-13)? _____

Take a few moments and jot down what you think God may have uniquely created you to do. _____

Think about the most painful thing you have had to experience in your life. How could God use your suffering to bring good out of this evil? What might he ask you to do? What would you like to do? Share anything that comes to your mind; try not to limit yourself or God. God is a big God, and capable of using you beyond your highest prayers and expectations.



God will empower you through his Spirit to use your gifts as you follow his way.
Read Proverbs 3:5-6; Philippians 2:13; Matthew 22:37-39.

Proverbs 3:5-6 ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.* ⁶ *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

Philippians 2:12-13 ¹² *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling,* ¹³ *for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*

Matthew 22:37-39 ³⁷ *He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."* ³⁸ *This is the greatest and first commandment.* ³⁹ *And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Why do you think we are told, "Do not rely on your own insight" (Prov 3:5)? _____

Trust in the Lord _____ (Prov 3:5a). Fill in the blank.

What does this mean to you? _____

What are “straight paths” (Prov 3:6)? _____

How are you enabled to do God’s work (Phil 2)? _____

What are you enabled to do? Why? _____

What are the two greatest commandments (Matt 22)? _____

How do these commandments fit with your calling? _____

If you could do anything your heart desires, what would it be? _____

Remember, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil 4:13).

Discovering Your Gifts and Calling

According to author Arthur Miller in his book, *The Power of Uniqueness, How to Become Who You Really Are*, “Giftedness is who we are by nature. It’s what makes us *us*. It’s the way we were designed to function, and therefore the way we actually do function best and with the greatest delight. Giftedness is more than a mere inventory of talents. It’s the lifeblood of a person, the song that her heart longs to sing, the race that her legs long to run.”¹⁷ God has uniquely gifted you and desires you use all your gifts to fulfill your destiny!¹⁸ You can see how freeing this is to discover who you are and to be able to implement your gifts in your life work.

In seeking to discover your God-given call, you must ask yourself “What do I do well and what gives me pleasure?”¹⁹ God wants you to enjoy using your gifts as you serve him with your life’s work. And no matter what pain or suffering you have experienced, there is nothing that can keep you from realizing God’s call and destiny for your life. God created you with your own unique mapping (pattern of doing things) and motivation, and no life circumstance can repress your natural and innate giftedness.²⁰ You are who you are, by God’s design.



Experiencing God

Take time this week to write about and reflect upon your gifts and God's unique call on your life. As you reflect on your childhood and adulthood, think about your accomplishments and record the ones that you most enjoyed doing and did well.²¹ Write down as many accomplishments as come to your mind, and include any pertinent details. Then, when you have made a list of accomplishments, make a list of the top four that you enjoyed the most. Examine these four in detail and see what patterns emerge. What are the similarities in each? Is there a similar motivation pattern or passion? What do you notice about yourself? Do you notice anything different about yourself than you have ever noticed before?

Take as long as you need this week to work on this exercise, since it will help you discover your call. Ask the Lord to guide you and give you insight into your own unique mapping. Understand that your achievements are not necessarily successes; they are those activities that gave you passion and motivated you. You can share your earliest memories; you can begin by sharing from your early childhood and into adulthood.

For example, let me share one of my early achievements and insights about my own uniqueness.

I enjoyed working at The Rental Company when I was in my twenties. I had my own space and office; no one told me what to do and when to do it. I set my own schedule. I was self-motivated. I arranged the office and hired the people I needed. I had the opportunity to meet all kinds of people, from all walks of life. I came to know their personal stories and, at times, even offered them spiritual and emotional help. I loved finding deals for people—great quality apartments for low rents. I enjoyed working with the landlords and helping them find good tenants; this made them happy. I enjoyed matching the tenant with the apartment. I didn't make a great deal of money, but this wasn't a priority for me. I felt good when I helped a person find a good deal—a great apartment for a reasonable rent—and when the landlord found a quality tenant. In assessing this achievement, I discovered that helping and serving are what I enjoyed the most and did well. But I also needed space without anyone controlling me or telling me what to do since I'm an independent self-starter. I work well on my own, but I work more diligently and effectively when left alone.

(For numerous examples, and for greater details in understanding your own unique patterns and giftedness, consult *The Power of Uniqueness*.)²²



Sharing God's Love

Based on what you learned about yourself and your unique pattern and gifts, write three goals that will allow you to use your gifts. Begin working on accomplishing one of these goals this week.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Action Point for this week:



Well, you've done it! You've completed all six lessons of the study *Accepted in the Beloved*. I pray that you've learned a great deal from each of the six lessons, and that you are continuing to grow in the amazing unconditional love and acceptance of God. You are accepted in the Beloved.

Please take a few moments to jot down some important things you've learned from the six lessons. Journal or reflect upon anything new you've learned and the things that you still need to work on. When it comes to healing from abuse, it is a process, and it takes time to receive the healing that God desires for you. Please be patient and loving with yourselves. And know that no matter what you're going through, or what you will go through in the future that you are a precious child of the most high God, and you are indeed *accepted in the Beloved!*

Closing Prayer

Oh Lord, help me know LOVE. I pray that I will continue to grow in the breadth, depth, height, and length of your love, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that I may be filled with all the fullness of Christ. May I accomplish more with my life than my greatest expectations, prayers, and dreams (Eph 3:18-20). To God be the Glory! AMEN.

NOTES

Lesson One

1. All references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
2. John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 41.
3. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 674.
4. Ibid., 641.

Lesson Two

5. *Dictionary.com*, n.p. [cited 15 October 2005]. Online: www.dicionary.com.
6. Carroll Saussy, *God Images and Self Esteem: Empowering Women in a Patriarchal Society* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 32.
7. Ibid., 33.
8. The idea of the “I am” list came from a special friend, Theresa Piacentini. Theresa went to be with the Lord on April 28, 2005.
9. The “mirror exercise” came from a spiritual directors’ group training help at the Free Christian Church in Andover, Mass., in 2005, taught by Andrea Lerman. This exercise comes from the book *Living in the Presence* by Tilden Edwards (New York: Harper Collins, 1995) and is found in Chapter 4, “Suspending the Interior Observer” on pages 58–60.

Lesson Three

10. Sandra D. Wilson and Gary R. Collins, eds, *Counseling Adult Children of Alcoholics: Resources for Christian Counseling* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 95–100.
11. Steven R. Tracy, *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 172–74.
12. Ibid.

Lesson Four

13. Archibald D. Hart, *Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 14.
14. Ibid.
15. James Allen, *As a Man Thinketh* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), quoted in Archibald D. Hart, *Unlocking the Mystery of Your Emotions* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 29.

Lesson Five

16. Harris, R. L., and Gl. L. Archer, Jr., eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, n.p. BibleWorks. Version 6.0.005y, 2003.

Lesson Six

17. Arthur F. Miller, *The Power of Uniqueness: How to Become Who You Really Are* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 32.

18. Ibid., 37.

19. Ibid., 120.

20. Ibid., 78.

21. See Appendix D, “Discovering Your Design: A Step-by-Step Guide” in *The Power of Uniqueness* for additional information on this process.

22. Ibid.

APPENDIX E

Dignity, unity, and holy purpose

Empower International Ministries

*Working together to release God's power in the lives of
men and women around the world.*

Purpose Statement¹

Empower International Ministries works alongside existing ministries in historically non-Christian and developing countries to promote biblical teachings on the equal worth and potential for unity among all human beings, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social, or family status. We seek to emulate the early Christian church in raising the respect, freedoms, and rights accorded women; in freeing men from norms of worldly masculinity that lead to violence and despair; in encouraging equal-regard marriage and family happiness; and in helping to create and develop community values that eliminate sexual, ethnic, and other social antagonisms.

We preach the Good News that salvation in Christ frees men and women from the materialism and cultural norms limiting their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.

Strategy

Empower International Ministries (EIM) works by establishing personal relationships with national pioneering Christians and church leaders who are willing to take risks for the sake of the gospel. Conferences and training events are organized

¹ Carrie Miles, a member of Empower International Ministries, drafted this original statement, although the remaining members brainstormed with ideas of purpose and vision.

jointly with them to plant a renewed vision of equal-regard relationships within the body of Christ in the respective countries. The local leaders will be the ones to incorporate this vision into their ministries, and will be in charge of the sustained training and resource development in culturally relevant ways.

An important component in these relationships is EIM's openness to what we and the developed world can learn from our fellow Christians in the developing countries, seeking to facilitate cross-border relationships between our respective churches.

Need for this New Ministry

Much of the developing and historically non-Christian world exists in conditions of oppression and despair. These situations are aggravated by restrictions and burdens imposed on men and women because of their gender, or by attributes such as age, ethnicity, marital status, and social class.

Women and girls in these countries suffer from a variety of abusive practices, including as female infanticide, polygamy, forced marriage of prepubescent girls or widows, the shunning and oppression of widows, isolation and veiling, genital mutilation, domestic violence, sexual assault, lack of access to education, and male usurping of household resources for personal consumption in alcohol, tobacco, and womanizing. They might be sold or kidnapped into marriage, expected to bear large numbers of children, forced to turn to prostitution in order to survive or pay for school fees, or suffer abandonment when their husbands lose interest in them sexually—all while receiving a cultural message that, as females, they are not worthy of better treatment.

Men also suffer from gender-typed expectations placed on them. Their abusive or self-serving behaviors toward women and children (alcoholism, domestic violence,

sexual abuse, sexual infidelities) are often expressions of their own frustrations in dealing with high rates of poverty, joblessness, threats of violence, and pressures to conform to socially prescribed norms of masculinity.

Economic pressures in developing economies lead adults to value children mostly as a source of labor or social status. Hence, parents routinely bear more than they can care for. Children suffer from lack of food, safe water, health services, and education, and may be neglected, sexually abused, abandoned, or orphaned. Ethnic strife, distrust, and violence are commonplace, as families/lineage groups/tribes scramble for their own survival in the face of limited resources.

Even with crippled economies and overwhelming poverty, however, most of these countries are still impacted by the technological and social changes ongoing in the developed Christian world. While wealthy, post-Christian countries have abandoned many of the maladaptive gender and sexual norms of pre-industrial and non-Christian countries, their family practices are undergoing a crisis of their own. The developed world is struggling with increasing divorce rates, decreasing rates of marriage, and high rates of non-marital births—all of which reduce the wellbeing of children. Young, educated citizens of the developing world especially are grappling with this transition and its attendant questions of which set of values to retain, what kind of marriages to form, how many children to bear, how to treat those children, what will the “new man” be like, what part women will play—and how their Christian faith informs these decisions.

Christianity is growing rapidly in many of these countries, with projections that, by 2025, the majority of the world’s Christians will live in the southern hemisphere

(Africa and South America).² Although government restrictions make accurate measures of the growth of Christianity in China difficult to obtain, there is evidence that it is growing rapidly there as well. Christianity has already gained a strong presence in South Korea. Christianity in India is also on a slow but steady rise.

For the most part, neither Christianity nor secular feminism has challenged the old patriarchal systems in these countries, although for different reasons. Secular feminists have been reluctant to challenge many of these restrictive practices such as “head scarves, face veils, the chador, arranged marriages, polygamy, forced pregnancies or female genital mutilation” for fear of appearing “‘imperialist’ or ‘crusade-ist.’”³ Conservative Christian teachings on male dominance/female submission, blindly imposed on unindustrialized economies, maintain the relative powerlessness of women and cultural belief in their inferiority. In many countries, for example, the biblical designation of woman as a “help suitable” for the man is broadly understood to cast her role as little more than a housemaid, subordinate sex partner, and child bearer.

The combination of rapid socioeconomic change and growth of Christianity puts these countries at a crossroads. This is a critical time to reach out to them with biblically accurate teaching on gender and family. Such teachings can have powerful impact on the lives of men, women, and children. Christian teachings transformed the pagan patriarchal family of the Roman culture in which Christianity first arose. It led to the outlawing of infanticide, polygamy, child marriage, forced marriage, and prostitution. Christianity discouraged divorce, allowed widows to remain single, insisted that chastity was for both

² Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³ Suzanne Fields, quoting Phyllis Chesler, “Failing Women of the Third World: How the ‘soft’ feminists betray their highest ideals,” *Washington Times*, 13 March 2006, A-19.

sexes, and eventually eliminated slavery, which was an integral part of the Roman family and economy.⁴

Most recently, studies of the impact of Protestant Christianity in Latin America show that it frees men from the burden of acquiring and maintaining worldly status that is the male gender burden. Elimination of “machismo” has significant benefits for both the men and their families.⁵ Maintaining social status in such cultures often requires heavy drinking with neighborhood and business associates,⁶ and legitimizes extramarital sexual liaisons—to the point that it is not uncommon for a man to maintain two families at the same time, or to abandon his legal family in favor of a paramour when he grows bored with his wife sexually.⁷ As a result, men in such cultures typically spend most of their income on alcohol, tobacco, gambling, status clothing, visiting prostitutes, or supporting a second family. Religious encouragement to give up such behaviors results in a decline in drunkenness, extramarital liaisons, and domestic violence, while improving nutrition for the family (as men spend less money on alcohol and contribute to the household food budget) and, in general, increasing the flow of resources to the family itself as the husband take on his wife’s concern for the wellbeing of their children.⁸ Anthropologist Elizabeth Brusco writes, “The machismo role and the male role defined by evangelicalism are almost diametrical opposites. Aggression, violence, pride, self-indulgence, and an individualistic orientation in the public sphere are replaced by peace

⁴ Carrie A. Miles, *The Redemption of Love: Rescuing Marriage and Sexuality from the Economics of a Fallen World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 110–11.

⁵ Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Colombia* (Austin, Tex: University of Texas Press, 1995), 120.

⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁷ Separate articles I read some years ago recounted how Chinese and Brazilian women spent a considerable portion of their incomes on sexy lingerie in the hopes of keeping their husbands interested in them.

⁸ Brusco, 5–6.

seeking, humility, self-restraint, and a collective orientation and identity with the church and the home.”⁹ In fact, in such cultures, Brusco sees these changes in male behavior as having greater impact in advancing the feminine agenda than more aggressive programs promoting women’s rights.¹⁰

Although “machismo” is a Spanish word generally applied in Latin cultures, the general pattern it describes—high rates of male drunkenness, incidents of domestic violence, paternal disengagement from childrearing, withholding money from family for personal consumption, and a strong sexual “double-standard” in which wives are unable to control their husbands’ sexual behavior—is typical male behavior in patriarchal cultures from the ancient Greeks to contemporary Africa, Russia, and Asia.

Other studies of conservative Christian groups in Latin America suggest that, while they teach wifely submission, they also affirm that women are men’s moral equals. Such teachings give women the confidence “quietly but firmly to challenge her husband’s conduct.”¹¹ In other words, admonitions that wives be subject to their husbands do not contradict a simultaneous belief in women’s basic competence and worth. One researcher goes even further with the suggestion that such submission is abstract enough not to interfere with actual behavior: “Evangelical beliefs allow men to maintain their ultimate authority in principle (thus preserving the male ego), while simultaneously accepting and fostering a more egalitarian model of household politics.”¹² Miles makes a similar

⁹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁰ Ibid., 138, 140.

¹¹ John Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil: The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil’s Religious Arena* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 112.

¹² Myrna Van den Eykel, “A Comparative Study of the Political and Social Activism of New Religious Groups in Columbia” (Ph.D. Dissertation, George Washington University, 1986). 327–31, cited in Timothy J. Steigenga and David A. Smilde, “Wrapped in the Holly Shawl: The Strange Case of

observation that conservative Christian attitudes toward family hierarchy in the U.S. have become progressively more egalitarian, observing that 78% of practicing evangelicals simultaneously agree that the husband should be the “head” of the household and that “marriage is a partnership of equals.”¹³ EIM’s teachings on mutual submission in marriage (Eph 5:21) offer clarity about the compatibility of these conflicting beliefs, encouraging husbands and wives alike to opt out of the struggle for power over each other and learn to conduct their family lives in self-sacrificing Christian love.

Empower International’s Activities to Date

Empower International’s support and encouragement give whole peoples rare opportunities to introduce a truer understanding of the Christian ideal for relationships into family and marriage. Surprisingly, the Christians we have worked with to date in Africa are extremely receptive to the biblical message of unity and equal-regard relationships between men and women. Indeed, all of our visits have been at the invitation and urging of native ministries eager for support in their endeavors to promote biblical equality, marital unity, and ethnic reconciliation.

As of 2006, most of the Empower International Ministries activities have been undertaken in conjunction with Medad Birungi and his organization, World Shine Ministries, in Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda. In 2002, Anne Mikkola was invited by Medad Birungi to teach in Kabale, Uganda. She and two other women from Finland

Conservative Christians and Gender Equality in Latin America,” *Latin American Religion in Motion*, ed. Christian Smith and Joshua Prokopy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 173–86.

¹³ Miles, 183. From this and other observations, Miles argues that, although conservative Christianity teaches male dominance, people who are actually living their faith rarely practice hierarchy in marriage, however much allegiance they give to it. Moreover, cases presented in her work and at conferences of Christians for Biblical Equality demonstrate that couples who nonetheless attempt to inject hierarchy into otherwise egalitarian relationships can cause them serious damage.

attended a weeklong conference organized by Sagiwom (Stand Alone for God International Women's Ministries), a women's organization in Kabale.

In 2003, Medad and Connie Birungi, accompanied by Margret Kiswiriri and Janet Duki, came to Finland to help promote biblical equality there at a two-day seminar. Anne found that Finns were more open to this message by means of the African testimony.

In 2004, Anne Mikkola, Patti Ricotta, and Leslie McKinney toured southern Uganda and Rwanda presenting one-day seminars on the messages of basic biblical equality and equal-regard marriage. Patti and Anne went again in 2005, teaching in Kampala at a "Healing of the Nations" conference organized by World Shine Ministries. They also visited pastors in Entebbe, discussed cell church organization with the cell pastor of Kampala Pentecostal Church, and preached in churches. Patti went to Rwanda with Medad, his team, and some workers from the United Kingdom, while Anne stayed in Kampala to visit and teach at cell groups and consult with Fellie on neighborhood efforts to promote a women's savings program.

Carrie Miles' visit to Uganda in 2005 included participation at Kyambogo University's mission week, giving two evangelical sermons, the sermon at a women's prayer breakfast, and three speeches to the Christian Students' Union. She reports that the students were very receptive to the ideas of the biblical ideal marriage being one in which the wife and husband both strive to serve each other and build each other up. Carrie also gave an academic lecture on the impact of economic development on the family and sexual morality that was also well received, as was her summary of this talk given at a Full-Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship. Perhaps the most useful part of her visit, however, was the day she spent working with the women's unit of World Shine

Ministries in a “train the trainer,” teaching and encouraging them in how to teach material from her Bible study guide, *Male and Female in Christ*. As a result of that session, several of the women are now teaching this message.

In 2006 Anne, Patti, Jewel, and Amy held a two-day seminar in Kampala called Leaving a Legacy of Biblical Equality, which was attended by church leaders and some selected men and women from eight churches. At the seminar, they taught for the first time together with WSM associates Margret Kiswiriri and Connie Birungi. The teaching done together was powerful. Margret raised the issue of husbands hiding money from their wives—a problem we westerners did not even know existed. Following her sermon, men came forward to repent of this behavior. Connie raised the self-esteem of African women using local examples of things that keep women down. The team of American-Europeans and Ugandan women also spoke together in Kabale and Gahini (Rwanda).

Pierre Kwizera, a medical student from Burundi, is translating Carrie’s Bible study guide into one of the local African languages. Carrie and her husband, Larry Iannaccone, provided Pierre with a laptop computer to carry out this work, which Patti carried to him in January. Pierre is making great progress with the translation.

There seems to be a demand for this Bible study guide as a tool for the local instructors and also as a “leave behind” piece. Many of the Africans are interested in examining the Bible verses referred to for themselves. Carrie is working with Arinaitwe Bright, WSM’s filmmaker, to have copies printed in Kampala, as shipping the number of guides requested is becoming prohibitively expensive (and the delivery of the shipments is unsure).

Plans for the Future

Patti Ricotta, Anne Mikkola, Leslie McKinney, and Carrie Miles are currently making plans to visit Uganda and Burundi in January/February of 2007. We hope to take a group of potential program participants with us to 1) visit the wildlife park (while recovering from jetlag), 2) visit a site in Rugungiri province where Rev. Medad wants to build a school, and 3) participate in a conference being planned by Rev. Birungi. Carrie hopes to work with Bishop Edward Muhima and his wife, Vashti, in conducting a train-the-trainer while in Rugungiri. We plan to fly from Entebbe to Burundi and conduct a conference and train-the-trainer with Pierre and his newly translated materials. (We anticipate that the potential participant group will return to the U.S.)

Patti Ricotta and Anne Mikkola have been invited by Rufus Priyarath to travel to India and teach in his congregations. Patti and Anne will go there directly from Africa; Carrie may accompany them. Patti has also been invited to Uzbekistan and Iraq, although those visits have not been scheduled.

Radio and Film

One current success is a weekly radio program on biblical equality being broadcast in Uganda. We have an exciting opportunity to expand into spreading the message with film. We are working on getting advanced training in film editing and production for Arinaitwe Bright, who has filmed many WSM functions. In some African countries, missions are successfully preaching Christ by employing trucks that visit the villages (which are usually isolated and extremely poor) with a newsreel, following by a Christian film. We can weave our message of biblical unity and equality with the basic Christian message. Christian broadcasting coming from the U.K. is also very popular in

Africa, but often hard up for programming (judging by what I viewed while there). We hope we would be able to offer our productions to these stations as well. Going in the other direction, a film made by three young men from San Diego on the impact of the war in northern Uganda, *Invisible Children*, is having a major impact in the United States, suggesting that our films may be valuable for educating Americans as well.

Empower International Ministries' Function

EIM provides resources and helps build networks of like-minded leaders globally, working toward global oneness in Christ in which gender, economic status, race, or other such human divisions will be broken. This vision will be incorporated and implemented by local leaders in different culturally relevant ways, e.g., by a renewed vision for the church community or small groups, building schools, providing micro credit, and the like.

Our functions may include:

Working with indigenous ministries to provide teachings on biblical equality, equal-regard marriage, biblically based family principles, and social reconciliation, particularly in developing, former Soviet-bloc, and historically non-Christian countries like China, India, Japan, and other Asian countries

Providing training, education, support, resources, and training materials for native ministries in their promotion of biblical equality, equal-regard marriage, biblically based family principles, and ethnic reconciliation

Providing opportunities for speakers from these native ministries to preach biblical equality in the United States and Europe

Providing training opportunities for EIM staff and associates

Creating and maintaining a network of experts to promote our goals in the developing world, including serving as a clearinghouse to coordinate and facilitate their travel with native ministries' need for their services, and vice versa

Conducting and disseminating the results of research and other scholarship on issues relating to equality and its effects on marriage, family, community, church, and economic development

Soliciting and distributing funds for the following types of projects as they support these goals:

- Grants and scholarships for school fees for program participants in developing countries
- Leadership training for program participants in developing countries.
- Funds, labor, materials, and expertise for ministry-related building construction and maintenance
- Economic development projects in support of women and families
- Health programs in support of women and families
- Abstinence and faithfulness-based HIV/AIDS prevention programs, including programs to prevent separation of families and programs to deter formal and casual prostitution
- Living and/or expense stipends for employees of EIM or its programs
- Travel expenses and support to ministry leaders and volunteers

Conducting tours of ministry projects and project areas for potential donors and ministry participants

Budgets

Study guide

Printing 300 copies of <i>Male and Female in Christ</i>	\$1,700
Print costs, Pierre's Kirundi translation	\$1,500
Print cost, cover design, the Finnish translation	\$600

Filmmaking

Training for Arinaitwe Bright in South Africa (two-year program)	\$18,000–\$20,000
Filmmaking equipment	
Laptop computer	\$600

Travel

School fees

Carrie's research project

Research assistant	\$70/month
Research expenses	\$50/month

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VITA
Leslie Ann McKinney

Professional Experience

2000-Present **Pilgrim Church**, Beverly, MA (a union church of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. and the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference)
PASTOR of COMMUNITY—Create spiritual communities within a multicultural context using gifts of prayer, healing, compassion, and mercy. Preach, teach, and administer the sacraments. Specialize in women's ministry by leading small groups, mentoring, and spiritually directing women to help deepen their faith in Christ.

INTERNATIONAL SHORT-TERM MISSIONS—Ministered in Uganda and Rwanda, Africa, and Calcutta, India. I have traveled extensively throughout the world.

1992-1999 **PILGRIM CHURCH**

CHURCH LEADER—Ministered in the church by serving as elder, Sunday school teacher, leader of small groups for women, and coordinator of prayer and evangelistic outreach events.

1978-1982/1993-FALL 2005 **DELTA AIRLINES**, Boston, MA

ASSOCIATE SALES AGENT for special member services—sold, confirmed, upgraded airline reservations, and serviced Delta's elite members. I was a member of the Delta care team. I was trained to assist survivors and families in case of an airplane accident and to work in harmony with mental health professionals coordinated with the American Red Cross, and to coordinate communication between hospitals, medical examiner's officials, and families. Presently on a furlough and expect to retire in 2008.

1993-1996 **RECOVERY MINISTRIES OF NEW ENGLAND**, Burlington MA

RECOVERY GROUP FACILITATOR (volunteer) for female survivors of abuse and domestic violence, providing a safe, loving environment for women to share their pain and suffering and to facilitate inner healing and hope.

1987-1989 **THE RENTAL COMPANY**, Marblehead MA

REAL ESTATE AGENT/MANAGER—Established this division for Marblehead Properties, a real estate company in Marblehead, MA. Managed employees, advertised, and rented apartments.

Academics

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, South Hamilton MA

Candidate, DOCTOR OF MINISTRY (Expected graduation December 2006)

Participant, WRITER'S PUBLISHING WORKSHOP (GCTS, Winter 2005)

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